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Writers' forum

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak is due today to hold his annual meeting with Egyptian intellectuals, writers and artists on the occasion of Cairo's International Book Fair.

The meeting, in which the president conducts an open dialogue with the participants on Egypt's political, economic and social problems, was traditionally held on the opening day of the fair, but Information Minister Salwa El-Sherif told the *Weekly* earlier that Mubarak had decided to hold this year's meeting one week after the opening to conclude the fair's many seminars and debates.

Israeli vengeance

FIGHTING for his political survival, Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres announced yesterday he would keep the West Bank and Gaza Strip sealed for the foreseeable future and might delay Israel's troop pullback in the town of Hebron.

Peres' popularity plummeted after suicide bombings by Islamic militants in Jerusalem and Ashkelon killed 27 people on Sunday.

Three months ahead of general elections, Peres has lost his comfortable lead in the polls and is now running even with challenger Benjamin Netanyahu, who has said he would freeze or slow the peace process.

Peres, yesterday announced a set of decisions he hopes will improve the Israelis' sense of security, deeply shaken by the bombings. He said he would keep the West Bank and Gaza sealed, barring 2 million Palestinians, including 60,000 workers, from entering Israel. The closure costs the Palestinian economy \$4 million a day in lost wages and exports.

Peres said he would deploy more security forces in Jerusalem and in the areas bordering the West Bank and form a committee to find ways to improve the safety of bus travellers.

The prime minister also demanded that Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat immediately disarm and arrest Muslim militants. Peres warned Tuesday night that if Arafat did not comply, Israel might not pull back troops in Hebron by the end of March as is stipulated in the Israel-PLO agreement.

Israeli army chief Amnon Shahak held an unprecedented meeting with Arafat on the border between Israel and Gaza late Tuesday to put a detailed list of Israeli demands to the Palestinian leader. They included the dismemberment and arrest of hundreds of militants from the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, and the smaller Islamic Jihad; Israeli officials said.

The officials also said that they now believe an Arab-American who was shot and killed by Israeli civilians after driving his car into a bus stop on Monday in Jerusalem acted deliberately.

Ahmed Hamidach, a 36-year-old naturalised US citizen from California, killed a woman and injured 22 people when his car crashed into the crowded bus stop.

Peace talks

SYRIA and Israel were scheduled to resume peace talks last night but the negotiations, overshadowed by Israeli elections and a suicide bomb attack in Jerusalem and Ashkelon, were expected to make little progress.

The talks aim at concluding a land-for-peace deal that would involve an Israeli withdrawal from Syria's Golan Heights. Both Syrian and Israeli officials felt that this round of talks will not witness any breakthrough, but the two sides appear willing to maintain their dialogue.

The talks, being held at Wye Plantation near Washington, are sponsored by the US. American officials said they would not intervene in the talks except in the final stages when the two parties have already come to terms.

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Bombing strategies

The Hamas suicide bombings in Jerusalem and Ashkelon could be the opening shots in the struggle for control of the Islamist group's future, between an expatriate hawkish leadership and Gaza-based pragmatists. Graham Usher writes from Jerusalem

"We want more of the stick and less of the carrot from [Palestinian National Authority chief, Yasser] Arafat," said the US ambassador to Israel, Martin Indyk, spelling out the American blueprint for dealing with Hamas. "The policy of co-opting Hamas has failed, Arafat must understand that what he does now will affect the very future of the peace process."

Indyk's demand followed two suicide bombing attacks staged by Hamas activists on Sunday in Jerusalem and Ashkelon that killed 27 people, including the two Palestinian bombers. The first blast was in central Jerusalem just before 7am, ripping apart a public bus, wrecking another and leaving 25 dead and 55 wounded, 19 of them critically. Less than an hour later, a second bomber killed himself and an Israeli civilian and injured 35 others at a junction near Ashkelon, well-known as a hitch-hiking station for Israeli soldiers.

The attacks, which once more pitched the Israeli-Palestinian peace process into crisis, came two years to the day since Baruch Goldstein shot and killed 29 Palestinians in Hebron's Ibrahim Mosque.

Between the first explosion and the second, a caller to Israel radio said the Islamist Resistance Movement, Hamas, had launched the attacks "in revenge" for the most-certainly Israeli-sponsored assassination last month of Yashua Ayyash — the alleged Hamas mastermind of a spate of suicide operations that have killed 50 Israelis in the last two years.

Indyk's demand to Arafat came at a time when the PNA chief's strategy regarding the Palestinian Islamists had appeared to be working. Since April 1995, Arafat has used a judicious mix of carrot and stick with Hamas. After every military operation in Israel, he dispatched his security forces in Gaza to round up literally hundreds of Hamas suspects, earning stern rebukes from Israeli and international human rights groups. In the West Bank, PNA intelligence services have "cooperated" with Israeli security forces in "joint efforts" that led to the elimination of Hamas' military cells in Jenin, Jerusalem and Hebron. And abroad he and his PNA emissaries have urged countries like Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states to slow the flow of funds to Islamist organisations in the West Bank and Gaza.

But at the same time, Arafat has dangled the carrot, leaving Hamas' social and welfare institutions largely intact and mandating leaders from his Fatah movement to sustain a quiet dialogue with Hamas' political leadership, especially in Gaza.

Combined with Israel's redeployment in the West Bank and the promise of Palestinian elections, these actions had the desired political effect. Hamas' support in the Occupied Territories declined, with Palestinians showing little stomach for any revival of the "armed struggle". More importantly, they worked to cultivate a more pragmatic Hamas leadership in the territories, whose aim was less to abort the Oslo Accords than to work politically within them.

It was this leadership that maintained a de facto hold on Hamas' military operations in the last quarter of 1995 — a lull which saw the death of only one Israeli in the West Bank, which was claimed by neither Hamas nor Islamic Jihad. In December, Hamas representatives

met with PNA officials in Cairo for "reconciliation" talks. Hamas pledged a "ceasefire with the occupation" on condition that the PNA "protect" Islamist fugitives against Israeli attack. Arafat, however, demanded an unconditional truce before any such agreement. Hamas refused, declaring its intention to boycott the PNA elections but vowing also "not to embarrass the PNA in its commitments to Israel". Israel's response was to kill Ayyash in Gaza on January 5.

Yet even after Ayyash's death, the rapprochement continued. In return for the PNA's release in January of 17 Hamas activists from Gaza prisons, Hamas' Gaza spokesman, Mahmoud Zahar announced that Hamas would participate in the Palestinian municipal elections to be held in June and was "in negotiation with the PNA" on preparing the municipal election law. In February, another Hamas leader, Ghazi Hamad, stated publicly that "the majority of Hamas members are now ready to give up — temporarily — armed struggle against Israel and turn to political activity". This, however, excludes Hamas activists whose allegiance lies less with the pragmatists in Gaza than with Hamas' more militant cadres abroad. For them, any unconditional ceasefire not only leaves their fugitives and prisoners at Israel's mercy, it means their abandonment by their own "inside" political leadership. And it may have been from these ranks that Hamas' latest suicide bombers emerged.

Hamas' return to the politics of Sunday's atrocity was meant to avenge Ayyash, to commemorate Hebron and to scupper Prime Minister Shimon Peres' chances in the Israeli elections. But it may more ominously be read as the opening shots in the struggle for Hamas' future — between those in the movement who believe that Hamas must now transform itself into a political but loyal opposition inside the Palestinian autonomy and those who wish to preserve its military capability.

Israel's response was brutal, predictable and swift. Within hours, Israel reimposed a total closure on the West Bank and Gaza which could endure for "weeks and maybe months", according to Foreign Minister Ehud Barak. In addition, Peres ordered a "temporary freeze" on all contacts between Israel and the PNA, halting the Israeli army's partial redeployment in Hebron, which was to have been completed by April.

In Gaza, Arafat joined the chorus of denunciation. "I condemn these operations completely," he said. "They are not military operations. They are terrorist operations. They are not only against civilians but against the whole peace process." Over the next two days, PNA security forces in Gaza and the West Bank rounded up more than 200 Palestinians for their "suspected" links with Hamas' military arm, Izzadin Al-Qassam.

But such measures are unlikely to carry much clout with the outraged political establishments in Israel and the US. At a Knesset plenum on the bombings on Monday, Peres announced that he submitted "a list of operational demands" to the PNA, compliance with which would be the "supreme test of the PNA's ability to uphold its commitments". These include not only the dismantling of all militias in the self-rule areas, but also action against "Hamas charities which serve to camouflage its military operations".



SHOULDERING THE BURDEN: a contented customer, photographed by Sherif Sonbol, leaves the 28th Cairo International Book Fair, the largest event of its kind in the Middle East. For full coverage see pages 2, 12 & 13.

Army faces labour in Beirut

On the eve of a general strike, the Lebanese army deployed troop reinforcements in Beirut

Troops in tanks and armoured personnel carriers were deployed in Beirut yesterday in a show of force aimed at heading off street demonstrations by labour unions.

The unions are demanding a 76 per cent increase in salaries and want the minimum monthly wage of 250,000 pounds (\$155) doubled to 500,000 pounds (\$310).

They have called for a one-day strike and street protests for today to press their demands, but the government says it cannot meet these demands and vowed to maintain law and order.

"This is our constitutional right," said Elias Abu Rizk, head of the General Federation of Labour Trade Unions, which represents Lebanon's 350,000-strong work force.

The government on Tuesday ordered the army to enforce security nationwide and upheld a

ban on demonstrations and also decided to revoke all weapons permits. The influential newspapers *An-Nahar* and *As-Safir* described the measure as a "semi-state of emergency" in banner front-page headlines and warned of a possible confrontation ahead.

"Gone are the days of toppling governments by street battles," said Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

Helmeted army commandos and riot police took up positions on major intersections along Hamra and Corniche Mzaar, thoroughfares and in various residential districts. Military checkpoints were set up at the city's entrances and the army command said all leave had been cancelled.

A similar deployment was under way at Beirut's Shi'ite

area of Dahieh, where unionists were demonstrating for a

ban on demonstrations and also to revoke all weapons permits.

Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, who took office in October 1992, has been credited with stabilising the national currency, boosting it from an all-time low of 2,800 lire to the dollar to 1,600.

But he has not been able to rein in prices, which continued to soar despite the improvement of the lire's value. Neither has he managed to check runaway inflation, unofficially pegged at 30 per cent.

in an Arab-African trade fair that will be held in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, in 1997.

Another resolution urged Somali leaders to cooperate in setting up a national government and appealed to all states to refrain from providing Somalis factions with military equipment to avoid any further escalation of the situation. The conference decided to dispatch a three-nation mission to Somalia to assess the situation on the ground and maintain contact with the various factions.

A third resolution welcomed Egypt's decision to host a conference in April for the signing of an agreement declaring Africa a nuclear weapon-free zone.

A Middle East resolution declared support for the Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations, affirming the right of the Palestinians to exercise self-determination. The resolution urged all states to provide support for the Palestinian National Authority in the West Bank and Gaza.

riots which brought down the government of former Prime Minister Omar Karami.

Street protests over higher petrol prices last summer also turned violent when security forces clashed with stone-throwing demonstrators. Thirteen people were injured.

Labour action will add pressure to the Hariri government as it strives to implement a multi-billion dollar plan to rebuild Lebanon from the devastation of the 1975-90 civil war.

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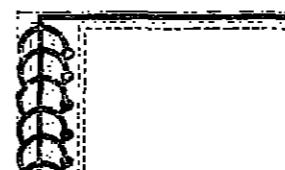
Moussa disputes Sudan's denials

As the OAU ended deliberations in Addis Ababa last night, Foreign Minister Amr Moussa urged Sudan to extradite three suspected would-be assassins. Inas Nour reports from the Ethiopian capital

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa urged Sudan yesterday to extradite to Ethiopia — within a 60-day time limit set by the UN Security Council — three Islamist militants suspected of involvement in an attempt on President Husni Mubarak's life in Addis Ababa last June. Moussa, who was in the Ethiopian capital attending a ministerial conference of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), told *Al-Ahram Weekly*: "Under the UN Security Council resolution passed on 31 January, Sudan was given two months to meet two clear demands: to turn over the suspects to Ethiopia and to renounce terrorism. Sudan has to prove, beyond any margin of doubt, that the suspects are not on its territory or extradite them. The general conviction of all parties is that the suspects are in Sudan."

The second demand, Moussa said, is for Sudan "to take a clear position renouncing any cooperation with terrorists".

Moussa said the Sudan issue and the Eritrean



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Children's law made 'agreeable'

The People's Assembly has given its initial blessing to a new children's law, but only after the government took the initiative of removing one of its controversial articles, writes Gamal Essam El-Din

The People's Assembly has approved in principle a new children's law designed to ensure better social, educational and medical care for young people below the age of 18. Approval for the law, which combines and updates a variety of existing laws covering children, came after the government made the surprise move of removing a controversial article requiring couples to undergo a medical examination before marriage. Under the original draft, violators of this article would have been liable to three months' imprisonment or a fine ranging between LE500 and LE1,000.

In announcing the article's withdrawal, Kamal El-Shazli, minister of state for parliamentary affairs, said that a children's law was not the appropriate place for such a provision. The rationale behind the clause had been to ensure that marrying couples would be free from diseases which could be passed on to children. But the government decided to strike it off, apparently anticipating opposition from a large number of deputies who feared that it would push some couples into *zina* (common law) marriages or extra-marital sexual relationships.

After giving its initial approval to the legislation on Saturday, the house embarked on a detailed discussion of its 159 articles. Under the new law, the state pledges that children will be guaranteed access to protection and care in conditions favourable to health, and social, cultural and educational development. In line with Islamic *shari'a*, the adoption of children is prohibited and

attributing their lineage to other than their real parents is also banned. It is also forbidden to give children names with contemptuous or dishonourable connotations. Midwives are banned from overseeing deliveries, a task restricted to doctors.

But the law failed to resolve the problem of the nationality of children born to Egyptian mothers married to foreign nationals. Under present law, these children are denied Egyptian nationality.

Although a large number of deputies approved the removal of the controversial "medical examination" article, many of them demanded that the children of Egyptian mothers and foreign husbands be given the same rights as those whose parents are both Egyptian.

A parliamentary report urged provisions that should be made to ensure the law's effective implementation: the state should upgrade the performance of kindergartens, provide provincial health centres with additional doctors, and conduct orientation programmes for parents and teachers on childhood diseases and their prevention.

The report also stressed the need to wipe out illiteracy among mothers and to build more rehabilitation centres for handicapped children.

El-Shazli, speaking for the government, said the law was in line with the recommendations of the United Nations and President Hosni Mubarak's declaration that the 1990s were the decade of "providing children with medical, social, educational and cultural care". El-Shazli paid particular tribute to Suzanne Mubarak for "the great efforts she is making to serve the children of Egypt".

Mohamed Moussa, chairman of the As-

El-Shazli and Zakaria Azmi discuss the law before the heated debate took place during last week's session

sembly's Legislative and Constitutional Committee, said the law was the fruit of extensive efforts by childhood and educational experts. He extended thanks to the government for cancelling the "medical examination" article "which was the subject of great controversy during the committee meetings".

Majority leader Ahmed Abu Zeid also thanked the government for withdrawing the controversial clause, and said that the new law conformed to the requirements of *shari'a*, a view echoed by Ali Fat'h El-Bah of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party, who added that *shari'a* "provides the best ways of child protection".

Samih Ashour of the Arab Democratic Nasserist Party said he did not object to the

...But not to everyone

of the new law and called the deletion a "retreat".

"I can't understand why the government decided to strike this clause from the new law," she said, describing the deletion as "unjustifiable hesitation" on the government's part.

Zemah Radwan, a professor of Islamic philosophy at Cairo University, maintained that the deleted article would have represented an important step for children's health. In her view, its withdrawal marked a "cultural step backwards. It is preferable that couples undergo a medical

checkup before getting married in order to avoid any complications afterwards. The government should not have revoked this article even if the people did not show cooperation or acceptance. Anything that is new is unacceptable to the people at first."

Mahmoud Mahfuz, a medical professor and a member of the consultative committee, also described the deletion as a "backward step". In his view, lack of social acceptability did not justify the removal of the clause. The government and people should understand that a medical examination before marriage may spare couples the ordeal of having a disabled or a disfigured child, he said.

visions forbidding the injury of children were referring to the issue of female genital mutilation, popularly known as female circumcision.

And Hanaa Samir Gabra, an appointed deputy, taking the floor for the first time, said that the law did not address the impact of dysfunctional families on children. She suggested that women who use their children for begging should not only be sent to prison but have their children withdrawn from their custody. Another suggestion, from Hamdi El-Sayed, chairman of the Doctors' Syndicate, was that the expansion of medical insurance to include all of society, particularly the poor, was a necessary complement to the new law.

A killing rampage underscored the Islamists' return to Assiut. Omayma Abdel-Latif reports on the week's carnage, while Khaled Dawoud visits a site of tragedy.

Assiut militants target Copts

Islamic militants from the underground Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya have launched a new wave of attacks in the southern Governorate of Assiut, including a shooting attack on a Coptic village that resulted in the death of eight people. The cycle of violence and counter-violence has claimed at least 23 lives during the past two weeks. Targets included Christians and police officers, but militants, together with bystanders caught in the crossfire, were also among the dead.

Assiut has been relatively quiet since the summer of 1994, when security forces managed to dislodge the militants from the area. The militants shifted their activities into the neighbouring Governorate of Al-Minya to the north, which then became the centre of Islamist violence.

The re-eruption of violence in Assiut has been attributed to the killing of two top members of Al-Gama'a — Mahmoud El-Walidi and Ali Mohamed Sotouhi — during a police raid on their hideout in the Governorate of Sohag, further to the south, on 14 February. El-Walidi, described as the Gama'a's deputy leader in Upper Egypt, was wanted by police in connection with a series of attacks on police officers, jewellery shops and Nile cruisers.

In what was described by Assiut's security chief Maj. Gen. Magdy El-Bassiouni as "clearly an act of revenge", militants ambushed and killed two police officers two days later in the town of Sabel Selim. The officers were named as Col. Mohamed El-Osaili and Lt. Col. Mohamed Adel Abdel-Aziz. Three bystanders were also wounded in the attack.

Security forces then threw a dragnet around Sabel Selim and Al-Badari, a well-known hideout for militants and fugitives from justice. Security was stepped up outside government buildings throughout the governorate and armoured vehicles patrolled the streets.

On 19 February, the eve of the *Eid Al-Fitr* feast, three militants from the Salama family, which is involved in an ongoing feud with the rival El-Hadawy family, sprayed a sidewalk cafe in Al-Badari with automatic rifle fire as two of their adversaries sat inside. Seven people were killed, including passers-by who attempted to give chase to the assailants. Security forces, using armoured vehicles and amphibious craft, combed the area for the escaped gunmen, who had taken refuge in nearby fields. At least 32 people were arrested.

On 20 February, the day of the feast, unknown gunmen opened fire on residents of the village of Tasa, killing two Christians brothers and wounding a third.

As security forces continued their sweep of the area, two women were killed in a shootout near the home of militant Abdel-Rahman Salama. Another militant, Abu-Hamad Mohamed Shehab, and a policeman were killed in a police raid on a mountainous area of Al-Badari.

But the worst carnage occurred last Saturday night when three escaped militants entered the predominantly-Coptic Ezbat el-Qabat village, south of Al-Badari, and opened fire at random, killing eight people, including two Muslims.

Security chief El-Bassiouni claimed to be disturbed by the resurgence of violence. "The situation in Assiut is very stable," he assured *Al-Ahram Weekly* in a telephone interview. "The latest incidents of violence are confined to the areas of Al-Badari and Sabel Selim, both close to the eastern mountains, the main hideout for fugitives in the area."

When terror struck

Nothing much ever happened in the aptly-named Ezbat Al-Qabat (hamlet of the Copts), a Christian village in Assiut governorate. That is until last Saturday night, when its peaceful pace of life was shattered by three unidentified men, armed with submachine guns, who entered the village at night claiming to be police.

First they stopped at Zaki Tawfiq's carpentry workshop. Tawfiq was there with some residents of the village and two Muslim customers. The gunmen opened fire at close range, and within seconds six people were dead, including the two Muslims. Two others were injured.

That was only the beginning of the nightmare. The gunmen, believed to be members of the militant Al-Gama'a, rampaged through the village, whose 5,000 residents are all Copts, knocking on doors in search of adult males to shoot and kill.

They broke into the house of Aziz Boutros, who was sleeping surrounded by his ten children and wife. Denifel Marzouk. They shot him; he died instantly. Boutros's terrified wife and children fled their home, and the gunmen, in the absence of any more adult males, contented themselves with destroying the family's small television set.

The gunman's murderous tour of the village was still not complete. Shouting "police, police", they continued to go from house to house, knocking on doors. One resident, oblivious to the carnage around him, opened the door



A family in mourning: three daughters of Aziz Boutros, surrounded by relatives

of his mud brick house. He was gunned down on his doorstep.

"We saw our relatives getting killed and there was nothing we could do. I saw my uncle getting killed and I could not defend him," said Boulos Tawfiq, 36 years old, rugged and strong, the epitome of a Saudi farmer. But Tawfiq wept as he recalled Saturday's events.

"How could we have defended them? We have nothing to defend ourselves with. We have no guns, or even money to buy guns. My relatives were being killed and I was afraid even to open my door."

The killings in Ezbat Al-Qabat came amidst a sudden escalation of violence by militants in Assiut province after a lull of nearly two years. Since 16 February, at least 25 people have been killed, including police and militants, in the southern province. The Interior Ministry said the situation remained under control, and described the attackers as "a few remaining fugitives". But ministry reassurances are of little comfort to the stricken residents of Ezbat Al-Qabat, trying to come to terms with shock, disbelief and grief.

"We have always maintained very good relations with our Muslim neighbours," said Hennina Boutros. "Immediately after the shooting, Muslim residents of Odmanna [the neighbouring village] came with their guns to defend us."

Boutros also denied the frequent charge put forward by militants: that Christians act as police informers. "We are all Christians here, so who are we

going to inform on? We are poor people who depend on our daily wages. The majority of us grow up and die without even knowing where the police station is."

Most Ezbat Al-Qabat residents do not own land and work as agricultural labourers for an average wage of LE5 per day. Those in search of better incomes either travel to the Gulf or Libya to work, or open small workshops. Like the epitome of a Saudi farmer. But Tawfiq wept as he recalled Saturday's events.

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going to inform on? We are poor people who depend on our daily wages. The majority of us grow up and die without even knowing where the police station is."

Since the attack, Samuel William, the village's priest, has been busy burying the dead. Meanwhile, other high-ranking priests have travelled from nearby villages to offer their condolences, and to assure victims' families that their relatives were "martyrs".

"We are sad and depressed. The worst thing was the element of surprise. How could innocent people be killed like this, without committing any sin?" asked William. However, the priest rejected the idea of self-defence for the villagers. The police should continue to be responsible for their protection, he said. "The best thing for us to do now is to pray to God and ask Him to put an end to this tragedy."

On the road out of the village stood Abdallah Hussein Ahmed, a Muslim resident of neighbouring Odmanna. Asked for his reaction to the killing, he said: "This is *haram* (sinful). This is something which could only have been carried out by *kuffar* (non-believers). There cannot be a single Muslim, Christian or any believer who could sanction such an act. Women are sad; children are sad, and since last Saturday, nobody has felt like eating and nobody has been able to sleep."

Alfredo's strong condemnation was not rhetorical or a prepared statement for the press. He used to share a plot of land with one of the victims, Kamil Farid. "He was a very kind man. We grew up together and worked together," he explained. "How could I not be sad?"

Towards a culture of peace

At a seminar, held on Sunday as part of this year's International Cairo Book Fair's cultural functions, first foreign under-secretary, Osama El-Baz offered an explanation of a new term: peace culture. It did not, he insisted, relate to past wars between the Arabs and Israel. "The Arabs did not commit any war crimes and we have no guilt complex about past wars," he stressed.

The term "peace culture" began circulating following the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe, El-Baz explained. "It does not apply only to the Middle East but to the whole world, because peace, and not the use of arms, is the new means of national survival."

In the future, the struggle between nations will be confined to economic rivalry, El-Baz predicted, citing the competition between the United States and Europe and Japan as an example.

"When the expression was first introduced, many observers had doubts and suspicions, fearing that it might be aimed at the re-orientation of the Arab

mind," he said. "People were apprehensive that the term had been coined to force the Arabs to think that the actions they took against Israel in the past were wrong and unjustified. This would have resulted in an Arab sense of guilt and marked the start of a process of re-formulating the Arab identity."

This theory had been floated with the example of Germany following the end of World War II in mind. "Under the Nazis, Germany committed the crime of genocide, killing Jews in concentration camps," El-Baz said. "After it lost the war, Germany was forced to follow a new policy so that the hearts and minds of the Germans would be re-oriented to reject the racist crimes committed during the war. This process was

called re-orientation or re-education. Conditions were imposed on Germany, including the re-orientation of the German mentality and identity through education and the mass media."

El-Baz said that some people had attempted a comparison between the Arabs and post-war Germany. "But this argument does not stand because the Arabs were not subjected to a complete defeat and unconditional surrender like Germany and Japan. Even after 1967, the Arabs did not have to make peace with Israel or accept its conditions," he said.

"More importantly, the Arabs did not commit any war crimes. On the contrary, it was Israel that committed crimes against Egyptians prisoners of war. We do not have a guilt complex and it is not as if we were trying to erase past mistakes. So, we should not relate peace culture to the past. Peace, a just peace between equals, is a decision that was taken by us. It was not imposed on us."

Edited by Wadie Kirolos

Economic regionalism was all the rage in Cairo this week as the Egyptian capital prepares to host the Third Middle East/North Africa Economic Summit in the autumn

MENA 3 on the US agenda

In the course of the countdown to the third Middle East/North Africa Economic Summit (MENA 3) due to be held in Cairo later this year, Judith Barrett, senior advisor to the US undersecretary of commerce for international trade, was in Cairo last week for talks with Egyptian officials. Barrett, who is responsible for all Department of Commerce programmes concerning the peace process and regional cooperation spoke to Al-Ahram Weekly on the upcoming agenda for regional cooperation and US plans for MENA 3.

What do you hope to achieve from your visit to the region at this time?

We are meeting in Cairo to begin planning for the Cairo economic summit very seriously. We want to find out what the US government needs to do to ensure that we bring you the highest level of business and government delegation. I am also going to Israel to plan for the Trade Ministers' Forum, which is a programme for ministers of industry and trade in the region.

At the end I am going to Amman because we have to hold the first steering committee meeting for the regional business council on 3-4 March which is mostly made up of Egyptian, Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian private sector companies.

But within the coming few months the council will involve the entire region. The government is invited only as a non-voting associate member. The steering committee will be the core group which will open the business council. The council will be in place and will participate in the summit.

Are the Trade ministers expected to meet soon?

The Trade ministers will be meeting within the coming two months. The meeting will probably be held in Paris. The Trade ministers are setting up PeaceNet, a trade and investment network on the World Wide Web.

Also on the agenda is a meeting of the heads of all the quality standards organisations on 4-5 March in Cairo.

What are the major concerns of the US regarding MENA 3 at this time?

We want to solidify the dates, and make sure that our companies are aware of the dates well in advance. We want them to register so that we can match-make them, and set appointments for them with Egyptian companies or other companies.

We are looking for real projects. We have a seminar in Detroit on March 20, in which 12 embassies will talk about actual projects that our companies can bid for in this region.

We also want to make sure that our government officials are available to your companies. At this stage we want to make sure that the MENA summit in Cairo is on the map and on the calendars of our top business managers.

We need to identify specific sectors, such as infrastructure, power, information technology, financial services and promote the summit in those sectors. We will be conducting workshops around the country to talk about the MENA summit.

The commerce department also has briefing ses-

sions that we invite US companies to attend to hear about the summit.

All this in the way of encouraging a first-rate business delegation. After the companies register, we start to match-make. We have a home page on the Internet where people can find out more about the MENA summit.

How do you see the role of government in these preparations?

There are so many markets that US companies are looking at, what we call emerging markets. But we want to make this market enormously appealing to our companies, and I think we will be able to do it. We want to say: This is the new Middle East. Things have changed here. Take a second look.

Although the US has contributed the largest portion of the capital of the Middle East Development Bank, this has not succeeded in encouraging European and Gulf countries to participate. What is the reason for that in your opinion?

History does not happen immediately. Every country that we have talked about has come very far rather quickly in terms of the overall historic package and everybody travels at their own rate.

You mentioned that you are trying to sell the Middle East to US companies as an investment destination. How can Egypt make the most of the summit in terms of business opportunities and what are some of the signs that would encourage US companies to invest in the Egyptian market?

I think we have seen many suggestions come out of the Gore-Mubarak partnership, many of them coming from the President's Council. I think that we can offer suggestions from what our business community tells us. The marketplace is becoming extremely competitive globally. We want to promote the Middle East as a market.

What companies are looking for is transparency in contracting, privatisation, improving the flow of information regarding the companies that are interested in joint venture projects, changes in the Investment Law, the Labour Law, the Patent Law and the enacting of new anti-trust and anti-dumping laws.

This is what happened in Jordan before the Amman summit. They instituted about 22 new pieces of legislation pertaining to commerce and trade. It was terribly effective for our business community to know that they were coming to a new Jordan.

What things did not work in Amman that the Cairo summit should try to avoid?

I think we want to make sure that there is more time for company-to-company discussions. I think we need to make government officials more available to companies to answer questions.

How large is the US delegation to MENA 3 expected to be?

We will bring 300 people, half business, half government. But with what we want to do with our companies, 150 is a large number. We want to make sure we bring the decision-makers, and we want to bring not only the large corporations but also some medium-sized and small corporations.

The Casablanca summit came to be known as the ice-breaker or the curtain-raiser in regional cooperation: Amman was the summit were all the regional institutions were created; what do you think will dominate the Cairo summit?

Business, business, business. Our companies were very encouraged in Amman, and they had time, but not enough time. To save time in Cairo, we will also need to centralise the way of finding out what projects are available, instead of each country circulating its own information.

Many of the projects advertised by the various countries in Casablanca and Amman never materialised.

Business knows how to do business. Companies know where the bottom line is. Government can only offer a service towards making it happen. But of all those projects, the ones that were short-term and viable are probably already moving through the private sector. Others, such as the Arabs airport, where we put \$5 million, are viable and will happen. The government can do a feasibility study, but the private sector will carry it through.

In your opinion, how long do you think it will take for the man-in-the-street to feel the dividends of peace?

I cannot put a time on it, but we are so much further ahead than we were. I believe that there is far more business interest in the Middle East than even Middle Easterners feel. When we hold a meeting at the Department of Commerce to talk about the Middle East, we always have to change the room, because we never suspect that so many people are interested.

Now, sometimes there are frustrations and we hear about that too, but it is not easy to do business in China, or India, either, so we try and look at it as a place where there are problems, but also as a very viable and exciting place.

How is the US government modifying its role in the region to suit the new developments?

I think we have a wonderful opportunity to add trade to the equation. With peace, there has been enormous interest by the US business community, and a lot of projects are here. I guess it's all about expectations. We do not believe things will happen overnight although we would like them to. But we believe things will happen. You start to see more and more people from the government, trade and finance institutions here because we believe that the future here will be in commerce and trade.

Nobody knows for sure what will happen to government aid, but the way to really build the stable foundations of the peace process is through private trade. Rather than only give political support or economic assistance, the government should act as a facilitator of this process.

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To reverse this situation, it was recommended in the report that the 10 per cent sales

Businessmen urge regionalism

Leading Egyptian economic players call for clear signals on trade policies in a changing regional climate. Samia Nkrumah hears their arguments

According to present plans, the Third Middle East/North Africa Economic Summit will be held this autumn in Cairo; Egypt's partnership agreement with the European Union will be signed; and its inclusion in the International Finance Corporation's global index of emerging markets will be realised.

But to keep pace with these developments, the Egyptian economy will have to gear up for the irreversible changes brought about by the advent of globalisation, resulting from the post-Uruguay Round multilateral trade liberalisation agreements and the growing tendency to steer towards regionalism.

An overriding concern related to the region's changing economic map is that a need to attract new foreign, regional and domestic investment. Panelists at a round-table debate organised by the American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt (AmCham) agreed this week that the first step is to state the country's policies firmly and clearly, and bridge the gap between planning and implementation. Heba Handoussa, managing director of the prominent think-tank, the Economic Research Forum, said, "Egypt must declare its currency as fully convertible. Currently, this is a de facto situation that needs to be made known. Let us define the trading environment by saying that foreigners can now establish businesses in the country without native partners."

Handoussa pointed out that "Egypt's low GNP per capita is compensated for by a high GNP in absolute terms or purchasing power. As for absolute growth rates, Egypt has the highest potential in the region".

The desired long-term strategy, said Handoussa, is to focus on individuals, as they will be on centre-stage in the coming years. The informal sector needs to be integrated into the economy through vocational training and support programmes. "We must allow the informal sector to help itself. Ninety per cent of private enterprises in the country are in the micro-sector, with an average of two to three persons per establishment," she noted.

But if society agrees on the goals, then why is a vision lacking? The main reason is that all agents in society must understand their rights, expectations and responsibilities. A vision requires consensus, and for it to be implemented, people have to agree to it. They will only do so if their interests are taken into account.

Handoussa said that labour standards must be changed and institutional reform be implemented at not only the general level, but at the specific sub-sectoral levels. This is one way of promoting the private sector at its lowest level, according to Handoussa.

Human resource development is another factor in economic growth that is still lagging behind. Most countries which have made a successful transition in their economies have relied on their progress in educational and vocational training institutions.

A thorny question regarding regionalism is economic cooperation with Israel. Undoubtedly, peace between Israel, Syria and Lebanon would make the Arab business community more comfortable in dealing with Israel, noted Mohamed Taymour, chairman of the Egyptian Financial Group, a brokerage and

fund management company. But, he stressed, the discovery of a new neighbour, namely, Israel lies at the root of the changing Middle Eastern economic map.

He noted it is important to acknowledge that Israel is a land-link between the Mashriq (Arab East) and the Maghrib (Arab West). But so far, due to residual hostility, the government has not given a clear signal to do business with Israel. This is despite the fact that Israel is a country with strong international connections. Its exports total \$16 billion and its per capita GDP is \$14,000. Without counting Israeli Arabs in Israel, the per capita GDP jumps to \$23,000, which exceeds that of the Gulf countries.

As a leading Middle Eastern state, Egypt has no option but to set the pace of economic normalisation with Israel, said Taymour who acknowledges that this will be a difficult role because leadership entails initiating change and reflecting a consensus.

Hany Rizk, chairman of Milky Land, a group of companies specialised in the food business, emphasised that a market — and investor — friendly environment is a prerequisite for export and foreign investment. In one year his firm attracted three foreign multinationals — two American and one Israeli — specialised in food and transport vehicles.

The rule of the game is that we have to buy markets. Our American partners gave us access to markets in the Middle East. The Israeli multinationals were given preferred stocks at zero values, and, in exchange, we got access to European markets," added Rizk.

However, integrating into a changing region that includes Israel goes beyond economic cooperation with one country. The flight of Arab capital from the region is a persistent feature plaguing the markets. "We must not discourage Arab investors from investing in stocks, bonds and real estate. Let the market determine the prices," Taymour said. There are prospects for high returns, but the success of the Egyptian stock market depends on accelerated privatisation and expertise in the capital market, he added.

Clear political signals must be directed at investors who need to be sure that their partner is actually subject to market forces. Another concern is that investors are seeking countries which open up their politics. "Greater transparency and political reform are two prerequisites at this stage," noted Mona Makram Ebeid, a former member of parliament. Nevertheless, the role of most Middle Eastern governments is developing to meet the challenges of a new business environment. It is now accepted that this environment must feature transparent and unprejudiced regulations in order to encourage the compliance of the business community. "At the same time, the government can play an important role as a strong regulatory body to streamline bureaucratic bodies entrusted with supervising economic activity," added Ebeid.

Market-friendly interventions by the state will continue to be needed until a balance is reached between encouraging the private sector on one hand, and protecting the underprivileged and creating jobs for half a million job seekers in Egypt during the adjustment process on the other.

Industrialists seek incentives

Now is the time for科學和工業，said an FEI report to the government. Mona El-Fiqi reports

A report presented this month to Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri by representatives of the Federation of Egyptian Industries (FEI) detailed the required changes that must be undertaken by Egyptian industry in order for it to become more competitive in the 21st century.

In the report, Mohamed Farid Khamis, head of the FEI, said that during the first stage of the economic reform programme, which aimed at achieving structural balance, Egyptian producers bore a sizable financial burden which has led to an increase in the prices of all local products. Consequently, he stated, Egyptian industries have lost their competitive edge over foreign products.

To reverse this situation, it was recommended in the report that the 10 per cent sales

tax on machinery, and the service charges and taxes levied on imported technology be abolished.

In addition, the report called on the government to give the private sector a chance to invest in the service and infrastructure sectors.

This step, according to the report, will lead not only to increased productivity but also lower prices.

The report also asked the government to grant industrial investors the same treatment afforded to investors in the agricultural sector through the sale of land at reduced prices for the establishment of industrial projects. In a parallel move, they requested that the government lower the price of energy to a level equal to that granted agricultural investors.

The report also called for a

reshaping of tax rebates equal to those granted by other countries. Moreover, it was suggested that the government reduce transportation taxes to 20 per cent, as in the past.

To boost exports, industrialists called upon the government to lower the interest charged on loans for industrial projects and on credit needed to facilitate the export process. In addition, they recommended that local products retain a 15-25 per cent price advantage over imported goods. And, to cut through red tape, it was suggested that economic legislation should be simplified and judicial procedures executed at a quicker pace.

The industrialists also noted that greater coordination between the private sector and the government would help

prevent public sector enterprises from establishing projects the private sector was capable of handling. Expanding the scope of cooperation would also serve to prevent the imposition of any additional taxes or tariffs on industrial activities without a ministerial decree.

In light of the fact that the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) has been in place for a year, said Khamis, all measures needed to assist Egyptian industrialists to withstand the effects of the agreement should be seriously considered.

Finally, the report highlighted the need for encouraging individuals to begin small and medium industries, and offering them the financial and technical assistance necessary to implement these projects.

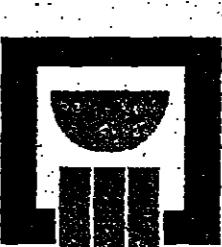
Figures Stand Out

National Bank of Egypt's Figures **

as at 31/12/1995 (biannual).

L.E. mn.

Growth Rate
31/12/95
31/12/94
%



The
National
Bank
of Egypt

	30/6/94	31/12/94	30/6/95	31/12/95	
Total assets	42528	45111	47293	50785	112.6
Deposits	32703	34052	35281	37043	108.8
Equity & investments	25337	26215	28327	31419	119.9
Surplus before provisions & taxes	912	539 *	997	625 *	116.0
Provisions & taxes					

** 6 months only

The said figures were audited by the Bank's auditor Mr. Hafez Mostafa Ragheb.

Edited by Ghada Ragab

Sudan approaching sanctions

The 60 days given to Sudan to hand over three suspected terrorists have half elapsed. Mahgoub Othman predicts what will happen should Khartoum continue to snub the UN

At the end of January this year, the United Nations Security Council issued an unprecedented ultimatum to Sudan. The council stipulated that Khartoum had to hand over to Ethiopia the three men accused of involvement in the assassination attempt on President Hosni Mubarak in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa last June.

The UN gave the Sudanese government a 60-day ultimatum to comply with its directives and affirmed that it would resort to further measures if Khartoum refused to obey the order. If necessary, the Security Council proclaimed, it would convict the Sudanese government of supporting terrorism.

Sudan is already ostracised by most of its Arab and African neighbours, which accuse the ruling regime of aiding and abetting terrorist activities. It will suffer increased international isolation if it ignores the new Security Council decision. Resolutions to the same effect as the UN directive, issued a few weeks ago by the conflict-resolution mechanism of the Organisation of African Unity, have gone unheeded by the Sudanese government.

Sudan has until the beginning of April before the UN takes punitive action, but significant developments have already taken place. The United States has decided to withdraw its diplomats from Khartoum and transfer its ambassador in Sudan to the Kenyan capital Nairobi, where he will carry out his duties. These measures can be regarded as a precursor to the US severing diplomatic ties with Khartoum. A statement issued by the US claimed that the steps were taken after the Sudanese government failed to provide sufficient guarantees in the face of security threats against American diplomats in Khartoum. It is an unlikely coincidence that the US action and the Security Council resolution came roughly at the same time.

Fear and confusion have clearly appeared within the ruling circles in Khartoum as a result of the UN resolution. The Sudanese government tried in every way to prevent it being adopted and is now trying to avoid complying with it. Khartoum announced, for instance, that it was exerting efforts to capture all or any of the three suspects accused of plotting to assassinate President Mubarak, hoping to stall for time.

What the Sudanese government fears most is the enforcement of an international economic boycott against it. Sudanese Minister of Finance Abdallah Hussein Ahmed recently announced that he expected the International Monetary Fund to exert pressure on Sudan to withdraw its membership — Sudan's debt arrears are estimated at \$1.7 billion. This, Ahmed said, would lead to far-reaching consequences, increasing Sudan's suffering and shaking the very foundations of its political system.

Meanwhile, a short visit to Sudan recently by American Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan was capitalised upon by the regime by means of a huge media campaign. President Omar Al-Bashir declared that his government placed great hopes on the visit, since Farrakhan supported Bashir and his opposition to the Security Council's resolution. However, whatever Farrakhan's standing in his own community may be, he can neither influence nor delay the expected consequences of the resolution. The Sudanese regime is merely clutching at the last straw.

There seem to be no indications that the Sudanese government will alter the course it has embarked upon for the past six years. One can only predict, therefore, that some form of sanctions will be imposed.

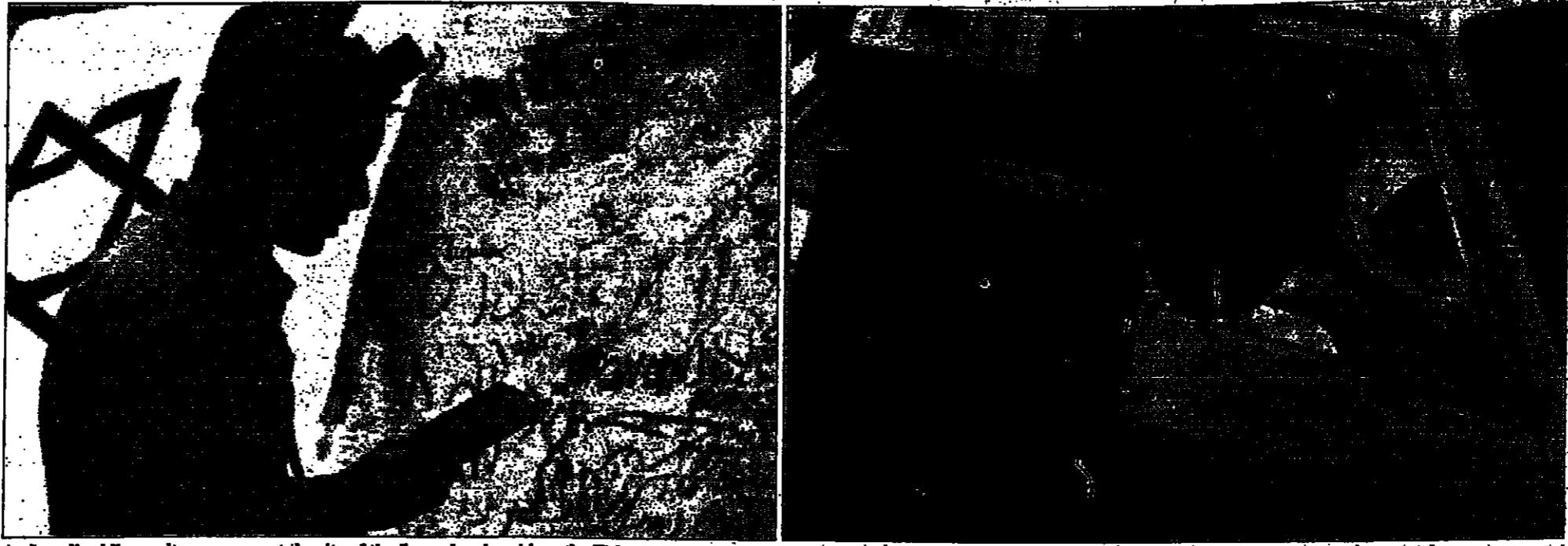
An arms embargo would be the first move. The Sudanese government's source of weapons has already narrowed to only one or two countries, and they are highly unlikely to oppose the implementation of arms sanctions. Economic sanctions might follow, ranging from the prohibition of trade with Sudan to a ban on all aid provided to it by countries and organisations. Diplomatic sanctions are another possibility; these could cut diplomatic representation of the Khartoum regime abroad down to a bare minimum.

Nevertheless, some of the countries which voted in favour of the Security Council resolution have expressed reservations over the expected sanctions. They worry that the Sudanese people — who should not bear the brunt of the punishment for their rulers' misdeeds — will be subjected to an experience similar to that being suffered by the Iraqi people.

These countries also fear the effect which a total economic boycott of the Sudan would have on them. It was only last April that a ministerial meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in Bandung, Indonesia, issued a resolution on international sanctions. The resolution warned of the serious consequences of sanctions, not only for the countries on which they are imposed, but also for their neighbours and trade partners.

The Sudanese opposition, on the other hand, has unanimously accepted the resolution, on condition that the imposition of sanctions should be selective and not total. One of the most important points raised by the National Democratic Alliance, the umbrella group of the Sudanese opposition, is that the sanctions should include all products except oil and its derivatives, since Sudan depends totally on imports for these vital commodities. Sanctions imposed on oil imports, upon which agriculture is dependent, even along the fertile Nile banks, would only lead to famine and the dire consequences resulting from it. These reservations aside, the Sudanese opposition wholeheartedly welcomes any measures which might undermine the current regime and, ultimately, facilitate its demise.

The writer is a leading member of the Sudanese opposition and a former Sudanese minister of national guidance.



An Israeli soldier recites a prayer at the site of the Jerusalem bombing; the Hebrew graffiti proclaims: "Enough of peace". Meanwhile, Israeli soldiers move for the clampdown (photo: AFP)

Forgotten facts

By Dalia Rashwan

This week's two explosions in Jerusalem and Ashkelon brought back to the spotlight a number of facts that many had thought were confined to the annals of history. The first of these involves the impact of the current peace process — or lack of it — on the character of Israel.

As happens after all attacks of this kind, Israel took its usual decision to close the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and, furthermore, prevented Yasser Arafat from making a planned visit to Nablus. This decision may have been justifiable before the establishment of the Palestinian Authority and the holding of elections in the self-rule areas. But issuing the order when the PA exists, con-

firms Israel's true colours as a force of occupation which is only committed to its own interests, even at the expense of international agreements and accords.

Another forgotten fact involves the PA. The two suicide bombings reveal how problematic it is for the PA to evolve the Palestinian revolution into a state. The PA issued a lengthy statement condemning the two attacks vehemently and one of its top officials described it as being the most forceful statement issued on a subject of this kind. The newborn authority did not stop there; its security forces in the Gaza Strip arrested around 60 Palestinians belonging to the militant Hamas movement which claimed responsibility for the two bombings.

Nobody knows how far the PA has responded to the list of demands which Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres announced he had presented to it. At the top of the list is the demand that the PA declare Hamas an illegal organisation, destroy the group's infrastructure and ban it from holding any public meetings or rallies.

Many Arab experts have presented theories on how the Palestinian revolution might develop into a state. But it did not occur to any of them that the revolution represented by the PLO would undergo change to the extent that it announces that former "comrades" in the revolution — whatever their ideology or political orientation — are one law. The change is more remarkable when one remembers that the occupier has not changed its character and has not withdrawn from all the Occupied Territories.

The last forgotten fact concerns Hamas, which carried out the attacks. The organisation is a part of the Islamist movement which most Arab countries know well; many of their ruling regimes have been embroiled in bitter conflicts with groups espousing some form of political Islam. It seems that Hamas is no exception to the general rule. It is involved in a struggle against the Israeli

occupation forces, but is now, in addition, fighting a new battle with the PA. Despite the different nature of these two conflicts, what Hamas proposes is not merely resistance to occupation and liberation of territory, but also the establishment of an Islamic regime as an alternative to the semi-secular regime currently governing the Palestinian autonomous entity. Hamas presents itself not only as a rival to the PA and as an agent of resistance to Israel but as a comprehensive alternative to both on Palestinian land.

The writer is an expert at the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies.

Iraqis pay the price

Last Friday, the Iraqi government announced that General Hussein Kamel Al-Majid and his brother Colonel Saddam, both sons-in-law of Iraqi president Saddam Hussein, were shot dead by relatives seeking to restore their family honour. The murders are widely believed to have been sanctioned by the Iraqi president in retribution for the defectors' betrayal.

Latif Rashid, vice-president of the London-based Iraqi National Congress, an umbrella organisation of opposition groups, said the killings "were coordinated by Saddam's security services and justified on tribal and family grounds. This proves that only the law of the jungle prevails in Iraq."

Last year, both Colonel Saddam and Hussein Kamel, considered the most important members of President Hussein's inner circle ever to flee the country, defected to Jordan and vowed to topple the Iraqi leader.

Hussein Kamel, former head of Iraqi arms production and procurement, revealed damaging information about Iraq's secret nuclear, chemical and poison gas programmes to the US. The flight of the two brothers with their wives, the president's daughters, was a serious blow to the ruling regime which Saddam Hussein considered unforgivable.

Other observers, however, believe the Al-Majid brothers and their wives returned home due to the desperate conditions they were reportedly suffering in Jordan. The defectors allegedly lived in political and social isolation. Iraqi opposition groups not only rejected General Al-Majid's leadership, but also asked that the two brothers be detained for eventual trial by an international tribunal for committing crimes against humanity, genocide and war crimes. Though the defectors were given a palace to live in, their movements and contacts were closely scrutinised.

However, the sudden and short-term defection followed by the family's return to Iraq veiled the entire incident in a shroud of mystery. Political observers attribute the brothers' puzzling return to Iraq, while they were fully aware President Hussein would not pardon their betrayal, to a plot by the Iraqi leader to persuade the West that it

Salah Al-Mokhtar, editor-in-chief

of the Iraqi newspaper *Jumhuriyah*, expressed hope that Arab regimes would view the incident as an internal problem among members of a tribe.

"If we put the stability of internal affairs of each Arab country as a condition to Arab reconciliation, then this will exclude many," warned Al-Mokhtar.

Recent press reports hinted at increasing support for the idea of giving President Hussein another chance, especially after Iraq agreed to UN negotiations and called for parliamentary elections.

Describing the murder of the two brothers as an "impudent" action, Mohamed Selim, head of the Asian Studies Centre at Cairo University, said that Saddam Hussein missed a golden chance to prove that his regime has reconsidered its hard-line policy.

"Saddam could have used the increasing support for lifting the sanctions to prove his good will. Now the countries which sympathise with the suffering of the Iraqi will find it difficult to trust him again," said Selim.

However, Mohamed Fayek, head of the Arab Organisation for Human Rights, believes that though the extra-judicial murders of the Al-Majids is a severe human rights violation, lifting the embargo against Iraq is a must to alleviate the suffering of the Iraqi people.

"What happened in Iraq should not

affect the campaign against sanctions because it is the Iraqi people who are paying the price. The Iraqi regime uses the sanctions as a pretext to tighten its grip over the Iraqi, and commit further violations of human rights," said Fayek.

Some observers believe that the murders will affect the current oil-for-food talks between Iraq and the UN. Opposition leader Rashid said the talks with the UN have been unsuccessful. "Saddam wants to sell Iraqi oil but will not give up controlling the distribution of food and medicine. He has exploited the people's optimism over the talks to collect the rest of dollars they have."

However, Selim believes that talks with the UN will not be affected because both Iraq and European countries will benefit from the deal. He believes that the Iraqi government has no choice but to accept the deal, especially considering the Iraqi's hopes and the improvement in the rate of the dinar. "Any failure in the talks will backfire and instigate economic chaos — a scenario the government cannot afford," said Selim.

The success of the talks will also be rewarding to other parties. Some of the oil revenues will be paid as compensation for the second Gulf war damages while others will cover the trips of Rolf Ekberg to check Iraqi nuclear power.

"The UN will see this deal to shake the sovereignty of the Iraqi regime, as the Iraqis will feel that their needs are being fulfilled by the UN and not by their leadership. That will be a complete humiliation to the regime," concluded Selim.



Crescent over benighted lands

Sadig Al-Mahdi, the leader of the Sudanese Umma Party, announced last week in Khartoum that he refused to meet with Hassan Al-Turabi, the leader of the National Islamic Front (NIF) which holds sway in Khartoum. "Turabi asked Sheikh Hamad Al-Ja'ali, the head of Al-Qadriya, an influential Sufi order, to arrange a meeting with Sadig Al-Mahdi," said Mubarik Al-Mahdi, the second-in-command of the Umma Party, in Cairo. Mubarik Al-Mahdi told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that Al-Ja'ali proposed to bring Turabi's NIF and the Umma Party together so as to work out a reconciliation between the two Islamists-oriented political groups. Al-Ja'ali also approached Othman Al-Mirghani of the Democratic Unionist Party.

"Sadig Al-Mahdi declined the invitation and rebuffed Turabi's overtures. He said that he will only attend if the government in Khartoum puts the peaceful relinquishment of power on the agenda," said Mubarik Al-Mahdi, who recently attended the Sudanese opposition meetings in the Eritrean capital Asmara. "We can only meet to discuss the terms of their stepping down from office," he explained. "The Sufi orders will have to act as impartial referees and witnesses to the process of handing over power."

The Samaniyah Sufi order, headed by Sheikh Al-Fath Ghabrallah, has been wooed by the regime in the past few months. Sheikh Abdel-Rahim Al-Burni of the Tijaniya order of western Sudan and Al-Ja'ali, who has many followers in northern Sudan, were recently sent to London for treatment at government expense.

The leaders of these orders have by and large remained uncooperative and the rank and file have sided with the opposition. "The NIF, which formerly shunned and sidelined the traditionally apolitical Sufi orders, is now trying hard to win the Sufis over," Mubarik Al-Mahdi said.

Mansour Khaled, a leading figure in the opposition Sudan People's

Liberation Movement (SPLM), told the *Weekly* that the war in Southern Sudan was intensifying. "The current battles are determining the course of the war in Sudan. The Sudan People's Liberation Army [the SPLM's military wing] is consolidating its forces around Kiw and Akswa in Eastern Equatoria province," he said.

Khartoum is trying to rally the Muslim world by claiming that it is winning converts in South Sudan. Eyebrows were raised recently at the much publicised conversion of the governor of Western Equatoria to Islam and the announcement that he is to go to Mecca for the *hajj* this year with a large contingent of recently converted South Sudanese Muslims.

Leading Sudanese opposition figures, however, were unimpressed. "Islam has been gaining converts in the South long before this regime came to power. Islam in Sudan, and in Africa as a whole, is moving southwards," said Al-Tijani Al-Taibet, a leading Cairo-based Sudanese opposition figure and former leader of the Sudanese Communist Party.

"Southerners have an aversive dread of historical attempts by the North Sudanese to Islamise, Arabise and colonise South Sudan," he added.

The conversion of the governor of Western Equatoria to Islam is nothing new and is not surprising, said Al-Taibet. "[The conversion] confirms his complicity with the regime. Perhaps he has set his eye on something more rewarding — money, promotion or simply to be better positioned within the ruling clique... What is alarming is the current rate of ethnic cleansing, systematic Arabinisation and Islamisation by the regime of South Sudanese people," Al-Taibet explained.

"The entire Western Equatoria province is under SPLA control," noted Mubarik Al-Mahdi in Cairo.

"Maridi, Tumbura and Yambio — the largest towns in the region — are all under SPLA control. Juba,

the besieged capital of the region, is surrounded by SPLA forces. The governor resides in Khartoum. For three years, no battles have been waged in much of the region as the SPLA has consolidated power," he added.

Mansour Khaled told the *Weekly* that there was the precedent of Pacifico Ladzhuk, a former member of the ruling Revolutionary Command Council and an Eritorian, who converted to Islam amid much publicity, but who, a few years later, renounced Islam and reverted to Christianity. The SPLA has a Muslim Council headed by a Southern, Taha Bior, to manage Muslim affairs, just as it has a Christian Council.

How is it that Mansour Khaled, a distinguished

North Sudanese politician, chose voluntarily to become a member of the SPLA — a movement widely perceived to represent the interests of the South Sudanese? "The question itself is very telling because it presupposes that there are two Sudans," he replied. "It presupposes that if you are a Northerner then you have to be identified with all things Northern. And I think that this presupposition is in essence the tragedy of Sudan."

As minister of education in 1976 during the reign of Colonel Garang Al-Dein, Khaled witnessed the beginnings of the Islamists' rise to power. People who were renowned for their piety were pushed aside as the militant Islamists took over. "I could mention here Sheikh Omar Ismail and Sheikh Mohamed Al-Hassan Diab who embodied this enlightened spirit of Islam. These pious people did their work without necessarily interrupting it for prayers and were criticised for that," Khaled said. He refused to go along with the NIF's interpretation of Islam.

"I know Hassan Al-Turabi well. We were classmates at school and we went to the same university at the same time. We both studied law. He was at

lawyer-general. I know him inside out," Khaled said. Was that the time when Turabi built up the NIF? "Yes. It was a crucial period of Sudan's history," he explained. "At the time, the only party that was functioning apart from the ruling Sudan Socialist Union was the NIF. But, more importantly, it was the time when the NIF made extensive use of novel economic activities such as so-called Islamic banking. The NIF then began to infiltrate the various national institutions — the army, the labour unions, the professional associations and syndicates, and the institutions of higher learning."

Khaled believes that the only way to topple the NIF-dominated regime in Khartoum is through armed struggle. He identified with the SPLA precisely because it is the only movement that realises in order to make any headway in changing the status quo you have to resort to a measure of force."

Khaled believes that the various Sudanese opposition forces must work closely together to topple the regime.

A fortnight ago, Farouq Abu Eissa, leader of the Sudanese opposition in Egypt and head of the Arab Lawyers' Union, announced in Cairo that Ertefa had decided to hand over the Sudanese Embassy in Asmara to the Sudanese opposition in exile.

It appears that there is now closer military cooperation between the Sudanese opposition forces and Sudan's neighbours — Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia and Eritrea. The Sudanese opposition convened a conference in the Eritrean capital recently. Mansour Khaled said that upgrading the war effort in Southern Sudan and coordinating the struggle between the Northern and Southern opposition had emerged as the key to toppling the regime. "We [the Sudanese opposition forces] want to operationalise the decisions arrived at when we met last year in Asmara," he said. "Two organisations have been formed: the Operation Liaison Committee headed by John Garang, the leader of the SPLA, and the Higher Military Committee headed by General Farouq Al-Sayyid, deputy president of the National Democratic Alliance — the umbrella group of the Sudanese opposition — and head of the Sudanese diplomatic mission in Asmara."

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السودان

Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

One of the most important chapters in the history of Al-Ahram opens in the autumn of 1896 with the birth of the provincial correspondent.

The term correspondent can be somewhat misleading in the early history of the newspaper. Sometimes, in fact, it seems interchangeable with "general agent". Nevertheless, there was a difference.

Like other newspapers that emerged in the second half of the 19th century, Al-Ahram sought to establish representative offices in the provincial capitals. The newspaper contracted nine individuals of Syrian origin to serve as its agents in the various cities in which they resided, all in the Nile Delta. The agents had two primary areas of responsibility. The first was in sales, which at the time meant to gather subscriptions. This required a broad network of personal relations. The second was to report on the news in their provincial centres. This did not take up considerable space in the paper.

As long as Al-Ahram remained a weekly paper (from 1876-1881) this arrangement was sufficient. Limited space and editorial considerations restricted the scope of coverage.

The newspaper struck a balance between national and local news and major political developments in Syria and the Ottoman Empire.

Once the newspaper became a daily, which occurred on 3 January 1881, the owners made a momentous choice: Their newspaper would be Egyptian, even if its owners were not. Editorial priority shifted to the coverage of national political affairs and domestic news. In fact, news from the provinces appearing under the heading "Domestic reports", would often take up half a page in what then was only a four-page newspaper.

Commensurate with its increased status and new perspective, the newspaper's circulation grew in the countryside. And the office of correspondents expanded accordingly. Not just in the Delta, but in Upper Egypt as well. Al-Ahram lined up representatives throughout the country, from Alexandria in the north to Aswan in the south. Moreover, in some provinces, there were more than one representative office. In Shumla there were agents in Zagazig and Fagoum; in Gharbia there were offices in Tanta and Kafr Al-Zaya and in Aswan, there were representatives in Assuit itself and in Dairout.

With growth there was a distinction between those responsible for sales and distribution and those whose duty it was to write the news. The former were called "agents" and the latter "correspondents". For every province there was a general agent, residing in the provincial capital. Other agents would be posted at the major centres in the province. In such small offices, the division of labour would not have been too rigid, and it would have been customary for the agent to do some writing, or at least substantial editing of items that would be submitted to him by the rural correspondents.

As for the correspondents, they reported generally on the news in their area, frequently offering personal, editorial comments on the concerns of the local popula-

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For the first five years of its life, Al-Ahram as a weekly had its provincial correspondents only in major centres of the Nile Delta due to the limited space given to domestic news. But when the newspaper became a daily in 1881, it lined up correspondents all over the country. These correspondents mostly confined themselves to routine news reporting. Only a few ventured to criticise, express views and take stands. These included a correspondent based at Damietta who developed into a firebrand, criticising the government and the British, then occupying Egypt. In this instalment of his chronicles of Egypt's contemporary history as seen through the eyes of Al-Ahram, Dr Yunnan Labib Rizq tells the story of the bold reporter's battle for free expression

tion or relaying their complaints, regardless of how trivial they may have appeared to people in the cities. The objective of the newspaper was to penetrate the countryside, and this means demonstrating its concern for rural affairs. Simultaneously, it presented a touching, in-depth portrait of the hardships of rural life, long overlooked by residents comfortably ensconced in Cairo and Alexandria.

Perhaps the means of communication between the rural correspondents and Al-Ahram's Alexandria headquarters accounts for such attention to detail. Reports were still dispatched by post and were lengthy; they did not have to be censored for the telegraph. In fact, only the Cairo office used the telegraph, and then only for urgent communiques. Few correspondents tended to cross the threshold between reporter and editor, although their reports frequently conveyed an intensely personal and compassionate narrative. One correspondent in particular stands out in this regard in the last decade of the 19th century: Al-Ahram's correspondent in Damietta.

It is precisely in the battle between Al-Ahram and Al-Maqatim of 1896 that this correspondent draws attention to himself. Al-Maqatim, seven years old at the time, had an entirely different editorial policy to that of Al-Ahram, even though the owners of both newspapers were originally Syrians. While Al-Ahram, together with Al-Mu'ayad which first appeared at the same time as Al-Maqatim, was vehemently opposed to the British occupation, Al-Maqatim was so openly pro-British, that the contemporary press and later historians referred to it as the mouthpiece of the occupation.

Although Al-Ahram and Al-Maqatim had locked horns before, this time there was a difference. In previous battles it was the respective editors-in-chief who brandished their editorials against each other. This time the combatants were the newspapers' provincial correspondents. Among them was one in Damietta.

To this day, we do not know the name of

Al-Ahram's correspondent in Damietta in the autumn of 1896. He never had a by-line and his name was never mentioned in Al-Ahram, at least until the end of the century. But it was evident from his reports that he had no intention of being an ordinary correspondent. He had a fiery, eloquent style that revealed a sophistication rare among rural reporters at the time. Moreover, his interests stretched far beyond the borders of his province to cover the deepest concerns of Egyptians throughout the country. Nothing could demonstrate this better than his programme for reform published in Al-Ahram of 24 June 1897. As one reads through his list of reforms, one is increasingly aware of an acute political and social consciousness.

His proposal lists several points to accomplish: "The British evacuation of Egypt. The preservation of peace and security. Employment and promotion on the basis of merit. The elimination of bribery in government. To amend the village service law. To reduce the land tax and to abolish the Land Survey Authority. To annul the military draft exemption tax. To alleviate the debts of the fellahin. To prohibit the sale of old clothing in lieu of taxes. Deterring village sentinels from snatching vessels of uncooked food from the fires in order to extort money out of people. Promoting government support for rural citizens with complaints of maltreatment by government employees. To abolish the practice of expropriating land and selling it for half its price. Enhancing law enforcement and crime prevention." All of these points "are easily achieved", concludes the author, clearly certain that they are realistic and feasible.

The unique succinctness and clarity of vision of the correspondent from Damietta did not emerge overnight. One can follow his progress from 1894, when there was little to distinguish him from his colleagues. In this early phase of his career, his communications were more or less routine. One reports that the district commissioner of Al-Afif was transferred, that a fire broke out on



three cotton wagons and that Abu Homos was divided into two districts. Another dispatch reports on a break-in at the home of a woman living in Izbet Al-Geradat and on a search for military conscripts in the same village. In a third report, the correspondent had to travel all the way to Siwa Oasis, which at that time was part of Al-Buhaira, in order to report on a dispute between the local police commissioner and the local populace.

On 19 February of that year, our correspondent writes, "The Fire Department has agreed to whether the people of Damietta would like to contribute to the purchase of a fire extinguisher pump. We offer no comment, other than to note that this pump, which costs 150 pounds, is of British manufacture." With this pointed imprecision, our correspondent from Damietta begins to intimate a determined individuality.

It was not long before he became embroiled in his first battle with authorities. This was with the irrigation authority, of which the senior officials were British. The rotary system used for the distribution of water was unfair, he charged. Evidently, he roused the official ire, for in a later issue he wrote, "Some officials in the irrigation authority have misinterpreted my remarks on the operation of the rotation system for the distribution of irrigation water. My intention was solely to point out the deficiencies in the system which are harmful to the farmers. If my observations are inaccurate, I urge the authorities to bring forward just one witness to refute what I said."

In 1895, he makes the transition from taking isolated jabs at the representatives of the British occupation in Al-Buhaira province to waging systematic campaigns on general issues. In April of that year, his theme was the recently instituted municipal councils in the provinces. "They make useful and valuable proposals, but their decisions are ignored by the Ministry of Interior, and should it so happen that the ministry ratifies a proposal of theirs, it is never implemented. Given this situation,

the municipal councils have no possible use."

Three months later, the young firebrand set his sights on poor law enforcement in the countryside, where "armed bandits congregate to raid villages and farms, killing anyone who attempts to stop them and leaving in their wake desolation and wailing women and children. What civilised government could permit such horrors to occur?"

By 1896, our correspondent at Damietta was more than an ordinary provincial reporter. Clearly he was taken under the editor's wing and given special status. His articles no longer appeared in the "Domestic reports" column. In fact, sometimes they were featured on the front page, side by side with the articles written by Al-Ahram's senior staff, if not the editor-in-chief himself. Also, unlike most rural reports which gave assorted news briefs, his articles would address a single theme and appear under a separate headline.

The headlines themselves illustrate this correspondent's diverse range of interests: "Government Projects and Administrators", "The Forfeited Right", "The State of Employment in Egypt", "The Course of Law", "The Provincial Municipal Councils", "Victims of the Fire", "I will never sell!"

Most of these articles addressed the problems of the Egyptian fellah. They provided a much-needed insight into the rural aspect of contemporary life in Egypt that was lacking in the writings of the newspapers' city denizens. They also belied the myth spread by the British occupation government under Lord Cromer that its policies benefited the Egyptian fellah. At the same time, as is evident from the headlines, the correspondent sought to redress injustices in general.

Equally apparent in these articles is his anti-British stance. We have already cited his criticism of the British-controlled irrigation authority. His article, "Forfeited right" attacks the policy of granting licences to British-owned railway companies to build narrow-gauge rural freight lines. In "I will never sell", he writes, "Our Ministry of Economy officials are busy negotiating with British companies to sell off our remaining property so as to give them a monopoly on our public utilities and services. We offer our hearty congratulations to those entrepreneurs, who will have gained control over projects that are sure to succeed and bring in a handsome profit."

The bitter sarcasm was not lost on the British authorities, who decided to fight fire with fire and their instrument would be Al-Ahram's rival newspaper, the pro-British Al-Maqatim. We first learn of Al-Maqatim's antagonism to the correspondent from Damietta in one of Al-Ahram's letters to the editor. Signed "a reader from Damietta", the letter says, "The main reason Al-Maqatim has attacked your correspondent in Damietta is that he refused to tarnish his pen by working for them. Today, your correspondent is the object of envy because he has had the honour to have been the target of Al-Maqatim's fulmination." One suspects that the "reader from Damietta" was a

close friend of Al-Ahram's correspondent there.

The subject that provided occasion for Al-Maqatim's attack involved the recently created Land Survey Authority. The function of this department was to conduct a survey of agricultural lands to determine whether the land area of a particular property conformed with the figure that was listed in the government's registers. If it turned out that landowners owned additional property, they would be made to pay accordingly. The measure was not well received. Our correspondent from Damietta complains that, firstly, it constituted a breach of the laws of tenure. Secondly, he argues that the property owner is doubly taxed. "He is taxed for the land which is not under cultivation, upon which he has built his home, and he is taxed again for his home and at the rate of a home owner living on Sherif Street in the heart of Alexandria." The act, he said, has provoked considerable grumbling among landowners in the county-side. Finally, he accused the Ministry of Finance of "blackmail".

On 27 October 1896, Al-Maqatim rose to the defence of the new Land Survey Authority under its British director and accused the Damietta correspondent of libel and defamation "that should be subject to punishment to the fullest extent of the law."

In his reply, the correspondent expresses his shock and dismay. "In all my reports, I have always been motivated by a sincere dedication to the truth and a selfless pursuit of the public welfare. How could the conscience of owners of Al-Maqatim have permitted them to distort the facts and to subvert my writings, as though by such intimidation they could coerce me into deviating from my path. I promise the readers of Al-Ahram that I will not sway from the course to which they trust I am dedicated and that after today I will give no further heed to whatever calumny the owners of Al-Maqatim may hurl at me."

Al-Maqatim responded that the correspondent was "insulting men of high rank" to which the correspondent from Damietta retorted, "The owners of Al-Maqatim rail against anyone who does not buy their newspaper. The pages of that paper are replete with libelous accusations against the owners and writers of other newspapers, and in terms that a street urchin could be ashamed to use."

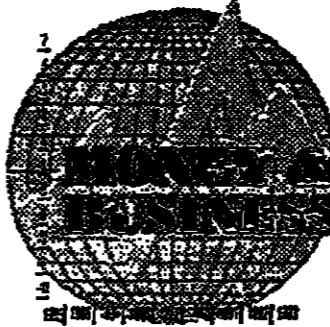
The battle raged on until, eventually, the editor-in-chief of Al-Ahram rallied to the aid of his Damietta correspondent. "No longer capable of concocting a civilised rational response," he wrote, "they have begun to cast slurs against his style of writing, a base affront that is clearly belied by our correspondent's resonant eloquence to which no writer or correspondent of Al-Maqatim could aspire."

The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

Growth in Lebanese exports

OFFICIAL statistics stated that Lebanese industrial exports totalled US\$60mn (80.8bn lira) in January 1996. Total industrial exports reached \$87mn. Statistics also mentioned that ready-made clothes were on top of the Lebanese exports (about 59.29 per cent) with a value of 47.8bn lira. Saudi Arabia is the largest importer from Lebanon, with imports reaching 43.52bn lira. Syria ranks second in importing from Lebanon. Jordan, Libya, Egypt and the UAE make up the remainder of major countries importing from Lebanon.

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- Total expenditures	23.2	20.0	16.0%
- Net profits	141.9	125.7	12.9%
- Investment accounts profits quota	134.8	111.0	21.4%
Percentage:			
- Total investment balance/total revenues	90.2	89.8	
- Cash balance at the bank/total liabilities	18.1	22.8	
- Allocations balance/total investment balance	5.6	4.9	
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- Investment revenues/investment balance	5.3	4.9	
- Expenditures/total revenues	14.1	13.7	

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Horizon and the second Indian jewellery exhibition

FOR THE second year in a row, an international exhibition for jewellery will be held in Egypt. The forthcoming Indian Jewellery Exhibition, organised by Horizons for Marketing Consultation in cooperation with the Indian Embassy in Cairo, and the Indian organisation HHEC, will be held as a result of the exhibition's successful run last year. The Indian Embassy in Cairo, represented by Mr. Bhardawaj, commercial attaché, Horizon, and the HHEC, are currently making the final preparations for this event. The exhibition will be held in Cairo at the Gezira Sheraton Hotel from 7-11 March, then move to Alexandria at the Montazah Sheraton from 13-17 March.

Mohammed El-Mayargi, general manager of Horizon, which has been connected to a large number of jewellery exhibitions in Egypt, both local or international, said: "We are aware of the importance of international exhibitions such as these, and our first priority is to make great strides towards success. In all aspects until this event joins the ranks of well-known international exhibitions held in Egypt. No clearer evidence can be seen than the success of last year's exhibition. We are proud to have the confidence and trust of India and the Indian Embassy in Cairo. It is this confidence which we alone possess which has made us increase our re-

sponsibility towards this event, which represents a unique cooperation between India and Egypt.

"Sufficient thanks cannot be given to all parties which contributed to the success of the event; at the forefront is the Indian Embassy in Cairo, the Ambassador Kanwal Sabil, Mr. Bhardawaj, commercial attaché, HHEC Ltd, Mr. Silam, the general manager of the company, Mr. Anada, marketing manager, the Exhibitions Organisation, headed by Rushdi Saqr, the Customs Department, the Department of Weights and Measures, the Gezira Sheraton and Montazah Sheraton hotels, and Al-Ahram Establishment."

US budget surplus

THE US Treasury Department announced a growth in the profits achieved by government companies as well as the introduction of further restrictions to which a US budget surplus of US\$19.27bn is attributed, an increase over the 1995 surplus which totalled \$15.65bn. The restrictions and ex-

penditures are a result of the bickering that arose between the Clinton administration and the Republican-dominated Congress about budget plans. These differences led to temporary shutdowns of some US departments in December and January. In the first 4 months of the fiscal year, ex-

penditures increased by 1.3 per cent only, in comparison with the same period last year while government revenues, mainly injected by taxes, increased by 6.3 per cent. As a result, the US budget witnessed recovery. During the same period, the deficit dropped by 31 per cent, from \$57.75 to \$36.65bn.

US to consolidate trade ties with Africa

RON BROWN, US secretary of commerce who ended a tour of 5 African countries, stated at a businessmen's conference that the private sector should assume the vital role of backing up development in Africa as it possesses both the monetary potential and the flexibility required in trade. Concluding his visit, Brown signed a memorandum of understanding with the African Continent South Development Group. The memorandum states the infrastructure, telecommunications and tourism as fields where the United States and African countries can bolster cooperation.

THE CHAMBER of Foodstuff Industries of the Egyptian Industries Federation has issued a warning to more than

Mali's peaceful potpourri

Mali is beginning to recover from a five-year ethnic conflict. **Abouali Farmanfarmaian** reports from the Malian capital Bamako on how the warring sides have been demobilised

A year ago you would have been risking your life travelling to Timbuktu. Now the three weekly flights from Mali's capital Bamako to its city of legends have passengers on waiting lists. A few hundred kilometres west through the desert, the almost abandoned region of Niamey is seeing groups of ethnic Tuareg and Arabs returning weekly from refugee camps across the border in Mauritania, making their way back home by camel, on foot, in trucks or in convoys organised by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Here and there, mud-brick walls and thatched roofs are being repaired and a handful of new wells are being dug in the sand.

It does not amount to much. A few hundred tourists, a few thousand returnees and a couple of houses. But for this landlocked country of 10 million, just surfacing from a five-year conflict, these are significant indications. They are taken as signs of peace, come to heal the scars of a war that displaced 200,000 people and threatened to add Mali to the new world order's portfolio of insoluble ethnic conflicts.

The linchpin of this fledgling peace has been the successful demobilisation of armed combatants and, with the official termination of the process scheduled for next week, government officials, the rebel movements and international donors feel they are finally stepping on solid — and common — ground.

"This was a crucial phase," says Mohamadou Diagoura, commissioner for the northern region, the person at the helm of the government body guiding Mali out of conflict and into a new period of security. "The population, as well as members of the movements, had to regain confidence and a sense of safety. They had to see that there won't be any groups going around with guns." The displaced of Mali's north — about half of which became refugees in neighbouring countries — fled insecurity and the destruction of property.

Mohamed Salim was one of these. The day after a house in his neighbourhood was attacked, his family fled to Niger and he himself escaped to Burkina Faso. There he was introduced to the Front Islamique Arabe d'Azawad, a rebel group with Islamist tendencies and the last to join the new peace process at the end of November. For two years Salim fought against the army. But on 26 January of this year he walked up to a lieutenant of the Malian army, in front of the green tents that stand out against the colourless dust of the village of Leré in north-west Mali, and handed over his weapon.

"Arms were just a reflex," he now says. "When we're not sure what else to do we resort to arms. But war can't have a conclusive end. So I gave up my weapon."

In doing so, Salim joined 1,200 other fighters who had come to Leré, the largest demobilisation — or cantonment — centre, to alter not just the course of their own lives but the history of Mali. Another 1,800 have done the same in three other centres and all sides are now calling it a promising end to, at least, the first phase of the peace process.

Abderahman Galla, one of the coordinators of the rebel movement's unified front, sees this as the first real opportunity for a lasting peace. "The hardest and most important part was to get the arms out of the way and we have managed that. This is the farthest we've ever been in the peace process."

Efforts to bring peace started soon after the Tuareg rebellion broke out in 1990 and an Algerian-brokered national reconciliation pact was actually signed by the government and rebel movements in 1992. But a first attempt at demobilisation ended in failure as the Libyan-trained Tuareg and Arabs picked up arms again and an ethnic Songhai guerrilla force, Ganda Koy, was born — a birth which, according to detractors of the Malian government, was midwifed by the Malian army itself. Revenge killings and attacks reached a high in 1993 and 1994 and the years following the peace agreement turned out to be the most destructive of the conflict.

So what makes it different this time around? "The difference between '93 and '96," explains Diagoura, "is in the management of the peace process." In other words, the government of President Alpha Oumar Konaré now has enough confidence to put its money where its mouth is.

For years the government had been asking international donors for money to set up demobilisation centres and integrate ex-combatants into the regular army and civil service, as provided for in the national pact. For years it had been told that demobilisation was a military affair and the responsibility of the army, not aid agencies. The government counter-argued that the problem of the north was a problem of under-development and that without money there could be no security, hence no development and ultimately no peace.

As an argument this was not difficult to accept. The connection between peace and development is now well accepted in international circles. The problem was the government's, especially the army's, credibility. The international community and the rebels wanted evidence of a real commitment.

This finally came when, after a series of round-table discussions sponsored by the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the government agreed to set up demobilisation centres at its own expense. Four centres were set up last October at a mere cost of \$2 million. Since then 3,000 war-weary combatants have flocked to the four cantonment centres to lay down their weapons.

"Symbolically, cantonment was very important because it cleared the army of any doubt regarding its seriousness towards the peace process," says Torre Rose, resident representative of UNDP-Mali, which has been asked by the Malian government to act as facilitator in the peace process.

Mali's international partners responded to cantonment by creating a trust fund to help with "security issues", namely the costs of integrating combatants into civil society. Since its creation in January, the trust fund, managed by the UNDP, has pulled in \$3 million from donor countries. This money is in part earmarked for retaining over half of the ex-combatants to join the regular army, the police force and a number of civil services. The other half, along with five to six thousand allegedly unarmed members of the movements, will receive a "demobilisation allowance" to help them start their new lives.

"This is preventive development," Rose comments on the sensible grafting of development funds to security concerns. "It's recognised now that it's much cheaper to take preventive development and security actions than to clear up the mess afterwards."

Cash handouts, however, will not guarantee long-term security. "We have to make sure that people won't need to resort to arms again," says Diagoura. "There have to be socio-economic initiatives and follow-up work."

"There's a lot left to do," says Galla. "Without security there couldn't be development, but without development there will be no security either. In terms of helping with reparation and the development of the north, nothing has been done yet."

The "north" extends above the river Niger into a deserted territory the size of France. Inhabited by Tuareg, Arabs, Songhais and Bambaras and neglected by Malian governments since independence, the region's underdevelopment was the main factor behind the 1990 rebellion. While everyone in the international community and the government is promising major development projects, it is still too early to see any of it even come to fruition.

"The pact is on its way and I don't see us taking up arms again," says Galla. "But there's still a struggle, though there are ways to go about our struggle without arms. With cantonment, only the military phase of peace has come to an end." Development will be the next challenge for Mali's new-born peace.



This week South Korean president Kim Young Sam (centre) visited India. He was greeted by Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao (right) and Indian President Shankar Dayal Sharma (left) at Rashtrapati Bhavan (Presidential Palace) in New Delhi. The leaders of the two countries, both of which witnessed probes into corruption scandals in high places, have been spearheading the fight against political corruption and financial irregularities in the funding of political parties recently. (photo: AFP)

Playing the pure

The fallout from the multimillion-dollar money-laundering and bribery scandal rocks India's political establishment in the run-up to the general elections in April, and the untainted politicians stand to gain, writes **Ganesh Nirkumar** from Delhi.

Vishnu is the Protector in the Hindu Godhead-Trinity. One of Vishnu's various incarnations, according to ancient Indian legends, is his assumption of the appearance of the mythical Man-Lion, known in the sacred language, Sanskrit, as Narasimha. In the Hindu epic *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, Narasimha rescued his devotee Prahlada by destroying the evil King Hiranyakashipu. The moral of the story is that the Narasimhas of the ancients saved their devotees. However, a contemporary Narasimha refuses to come to the rescue of his ministerial masters.

There is a realisation that the funding of political parties is the main motive behind financial irregularities and corruption in Indian party politics. India might well set a precedent for other Third World countries by tackling the touchy issue of regulating the funding of political parties in a multi-party system. However, there is an awareness of the limitations inherent in checking corruption in party politics. "Political parties as institutions are the vehicles of democracy and the weakening of such institutions in any manner should not be countenanced," warned a CBI resolution on the Jain scam last week.

Premier Rao did not rush to the defence of the ministers who faced the heat from the CBI investigations. But he is not going to stop the accused politicians from shooting their mouths off to the local and international media either. India, after all, is the world's largest democracy, enjoys complete freedom of speech and has one of the freest press media in the Third World. With some 930 million people, the rest of the Third World closely watches political developments in the vast Asian country.

It is not clear whether the investigations will improve the image of the ruling Congress Party ahead of the general elections in April. The ministers have maintained the highest

traditions of parliamentary democracy," Congress Party spokesman, Vital Gadgil, said recently. There is much talk in New Delhi of the need to "project new political faces" in the political arena. Narasimha Rao has given the CBI a "free hand" to probe into the financial status of his cabinet ministers.

According to the latest opinion

barely dried on an economic reform and liberalisation programme when the unprecedented Jain scandal cast a long shadow of doubt on the future. Scandals are bound to multiply as the government speeds up its deregulation plans, the left parties charge.

Opposition figures have not been spared either. The leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Lal Krishna Advani, is battling to clear his name. The BJP, India's largest opposition party, propagates the concept of Hindutva, or the establishment of a Hindu fundamentalist state; it advocates Hindu supremacy and the annulment of traditional Indian secularism.

Its leaders want to check what

they see as the special privileges granted to India's 150 million-strong Muslim minority. Advani

warned last week that the government confined up the accusations of his involvement in the Jain scandal in order to blunt the BJP's anti-corruption campaign.

Surendra Singh, the leader of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), told *Al Ahram Weekly* that his party was the only one in the country that was not blighted by the corruption scandal. He said that while the Supreme Court asked 15 political parties — including the big three: the ruling Congress Party, the BJP and the socialist-oriented Janata Dal Party — for their financial records, the CPI(M) was spared the embarrassment of having its leaders charged. "The CPI(M) is incorruptible," Surendra Singh said. "The CPI(M) Central Committee has been filing regularly its annual audited statements of accounts to the Income Tax department."

In the pre-Jain scandal days, the Indian politician was the proverbial "Mr Clean". Indian politicians led austere lifestyles and shunned the seductions of the good life enjoyed by their counterparts in less socialist-inclined

political entities with faster growing economies to the east — where putting political rank, bribery, corruption and opulent lifestyles go hand in hand. As far as the Third World politicians go, the Indian political establishment is relatively un-contaminated by corruption scandals of the scale seen, say, in Korea, Mexico and other emerging markets in South East Asia and Latin America. Narasimha Rao has taken it upon himself to salvage something of the country's political reputation for former good name.

The ruling Congress Party is playing its hopes for an electoral victory on aligning itself with left parties such as the Janata Dal and the CPI (M). The corruption indictments have hit India's two biggest parties — Congress and the BJP — hard.

The 50-member corruption scandal investigation team, headed by the CBI's Anti-Corruption Unit Director, G. Acharya, is focusing on the worst offenders, but ramifications of the scandal will affect the entire Indian political establishment. The few who will play innocent and get away unscathed will determine the future course of democratic practice in the Indian subcontinent.

CBI Director K. Vijay Ramaswamy warned that a system of "profiling" politicians would be instituted shortly. These investigations will include scrutiny of the financial status of parlementarians, cabinet ministers and other politicians. No one is above the law, Ramaswamy assured. "The CBI concentrated on 36 names which have neither been coded nor abbreviated in the diaries," explained Ramaswamy.

The CBI is being helped in its investigation by the Income Tax Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, the Bureau of Economic Intelligence, the Directorate of Enforcement and the Directorate of Foreign Trade. India's Minister of Foreign Affairs Salman Khurshid told *Al Ahram Weekly* no stone would be left unturned until the truth was out.

Nigeria's day of reckoning

Worldwide denunciation of Nigeria for its execution of nine activists last year has done little to make the regime less repressive. **Rachad Antonius** argues that an oil embargo is needed

The execution of writer Ken Saro-Wiwa, together with eight other Nigerian citizens, on 10 November last year drew world attention to Africa's most populous country, Nigeria. The nine were hanged after a trial where justice was totally absent. However, despite wide-scale condemnation of the act, the West African nation's military regime continues to repress human rights.

Nigeria achieved independence in 1960 and was under military rule for 26 of the 35 years which have elapsed since then. In 1987, President Ibrahim Babangida, who had come to power in a military coup two years earlier, set in motion a transition to civilian rule, in response to popular pressure.

Legislative elections were held in 1992 and presidential elections in 1993. Chief Moshood Abiola, a wealthy businessman from the southwest of the country, won the presidential elections with 59 per cent of the votes; he had a clear majority in 22 of Nigeria's 31 states. Even in the northern region, he managed to obtain a majority in four of the 11 states and gain 43 per cent of the votes.

But President Babangida refused to recognise this victory. He annulled the election results and announced that a new election would take place on some future, undetermined date. Wide protests followed and Babangida had to resign. In November 1993, his successor was deposed by an army coup and General Sani Abacha took power. The general's military regime banned political parties and dismantled the previously elected legislatures.

In the two years that followed, the country witnessed wide-ranging human rights abuses. The regime punished severely any political activity and repressed journalists, trade unionists and human rights activists.

An alleged coup was said to have taken place in March 1995. It was followed by a far-reaching campaign of arrests and illegal detentions, and it allowed the government to further control all information and restrict all political activity. Some critics have claimed that there was no evidence of a coup and that the crisis had been fabricated by the government to perpetuate its tight control. Newspapers have

been shut down, journalists arrested without charges, sometimes released and sometimes not, and thousands of activists imprisoned.

But with its 111 million people, Nigeria enjoys a vigorous economic and political culture. There is a strong private sector, trade unions, professional associations, various public media and a variety of civil institutions that form a diverse civil society.

Political protest has united many of these sectors and many of the institutions that have demanded recognition of the 1993 election results. The campaign for a return to democracy includes people of various ethnic groups, religions and political persuasions. But the government has met these demands with more repression.

The repression was particularly harsh in Ogoniland, an oil-rich region in southeastern Nigeria. Oil accounts for 80 to 90 per cent of Nigeria's exports. The Ogoni people in the Niger delta had been protesting the devastation of their land and the contamination of their rivers by oil companies — particularly Shell — who were in collusion with the Nigerian government.

Nigerian human rights organisations claim that in 1993 alone, more than 1,000 Ogonis were killed. The protest movement of the indigenous population had rallied the support of environmentalists, human rights activists and political leaders.

On 21 May 1995, a mob killed four Ogoni leaders who were seen as pro-government. The local security forces responded by launching punitive raids on Ogoni villages. According to the 1994 Human Rights Watch report, "These raids were characterised by flagrant human rights abuses, including extra-judicial executions, indiscriminate shooting, arbitrary arrests and detention, floggings, rapes, looting and extortions."

Shortly after the raids, writer Ken Saro-Wiwa, who led the Movement for Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), was detained with several other activists. Charges were not filed against them until February 1995, when they were charged with murdering the four Ogoni leaders in May 1994.

It soon became clear to the lawyers of the defendants that the government had decided to condemn them long ago, even if it had no evidence against them and even if the testimony of the government's key witness contradicted earlier statements made by the witnesses. The defendants' lawyers withdrew from the case in order not to give the rigged trials any kind of legitimacy. In November 1995, Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other defendants were executed.

These executions triggered a strong response from both the Nigerian people and the international community. Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka, a Nobel laureate for literature, has played an important role in denouncing the repression in his country, and his assertion that "the man dies in all who keep silent in the face of tyranny" has inspired the Nigerian opposition.

With the Nigerian opposition, he is asking the international community to exert strong pressure on Nigeria, and in particular to impose an international oil embargo.

Earlier last year, the international community was hesitant to reprimand Nigeria for its abuse of democracy. In February 1995, a mild resolution requesting the return to democracy in Nigeria was defeated at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, as most African countries voted against it. The British government endorsed some of the measures against Nigeria, but evaded many of them in practice.

But after the execution of Saro-Wiwa and his colleagues, the reactions were stronger. The Commonwealth countries suspended Nigeria's

membership for two years, with a threat to extend it after that period if there was no return to democracy. Such measures had the support of most African Commonwealth leaders, such as Nelson Mandela, who had advocated a more diplomatic approach before the slaying of Saro-Wiwa. But some Commonwealth countries were in favour of stronger measures.

The European Commission suspended development cooperation with Nigeria and opted for an embargo on arms. The United States had started to exert some pressure after the annulment of the 1993 elections. But after the executions, it banned all sales and maintenance of military equipment and added restrictions on granting visas to Nigerian officials.

These pressures have not been sufficient to force a change in attitude on the part of the Nigerian government. Indeed, the repression of human rights activists has continued. For instance, Olisa Agbakoba, past president of Nigeria's Civil Liberties Organisation and former legal counsel for Saro-Wiwa, was detained at the airport and his passport confiscated a few weeks ago, after a visit to Canada and the US. Many observers believe that only a concerted commercial embargo, especially on Nigerian oil sales, will induce a change. Six members of the European Union — Germany, Luxembourg, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands — have expressed their support for such a measure. Eighty per cent of Nigeria's oil is exported to European countries and the US. An oil embargo would be quite effective if the US participated as well.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the work of the Nigerian human rights organisations has been instrumental in bringing light to the many cases of violations, and that it is the Nigerian opposition which is indicating the directions for change. International pressure cannot create local political alternatives but it should prevent dictatorial governments from staying in power simply because they have access to foreign funds. And while we are conscious of the very selective way in which international commercial sanctions are applied, one cannot refrain from saying, when they are justified: it is time to exert more sanctions.



The World Press Photo Children's Award 1996 went to American photographer David Turnley for *Time Magazine* for his picture of a Muslim refugee woman from the UN "safe haven" of Srebrenica in Bosnia, which fell to the Serbs in July 1995. Soon after, some 8,000 Srebrenica men were executed by Serbs (photo: AFP)

Genocide or war crimes?

As Bosnians begin to rebuild their country, debate continues over the exact nature of the war crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia. Mariz Tadros reviews the arguments

The recent arrest of two Serb officers, General Djordje Djukic and Colonel Alekse Krasmanovic, by the central Bosnian government for war crimes came shortly before the first post-Dayton Balkan summit, but did not undermine it.

The summit, held in Rome on 17-18 February, restored all contacts between the Serbs, Croats and Bosnians and the NATO-led Implementation Force in Bosnia. General Ratko Mladic, the Bosnian Serb Army chief, had temporarily suspended talks with NATO immediately after the arrest of the two officers.

The Rome summit also reached an agreement on the question of war crimes but no details were released. The three sides promised to release all prisoners of war. The problems concerning the re-unification of the two Bosnian cities of Sarajevo and Mostar were also resolved.

Debate continued, however, on whether one should talk of "war crimes" or "genocide" when referring to the atrocities committed during the four-year Balkan war. The line dividing the two often seems blurred. Article 2 of the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide defines genocide as the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group through, for instance, mass murder and "deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction".

Israel Charny, an internationally acclaimed professor of genocide studies, is of the view that genocide and war crimes are not synonymous. He defines genocide as the "mass killing of substantial numbers of human beings when not in the course of military action against the military forces of an avowed enemy, under conditions of the essential defencelessness and helplessness of the

victims". He has presented a number of factors that characterize a genocide, such as the exertion of efforts to overcome resistance, the commitment to barring the escape of victims and the indulgence in persecutory cruelty.

Ardija Hadrovich, the Bosnian ambassador to Egypt told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the Serb campaign in Bosnia-Herzegovina was orchestrated with the intention of ethnic annihilation. "Reality confirms that this was a war with a pre-meditated plan set up many years before its outbreak," he said. "The head of the War Crimes Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia confirms that, for instance, in the northwestern region of Bosnia, there were training camps for teaching soldiers how to annihilate large numbers of people. He asserted that it is impossible to kill thousands of people in a short period of time without there having been a strategy set out beforehand."

Hadrovich commented that people in the former Yugoslavia merely looked on in disbelief at certain killing actions prior to the war. "From my personal experience in Bosnia, there were indications all around us before the war that something was going to happen," he said. "For instance, in Sarajevo, which is surrounded by mountains, a year before the outbreak of war we suddenly found the Yugoslav army digging up trenches and sealing off the city. We asked them what was going on. They said to us: 'We are doing this for the sake of defending the city should there be an attack from an outside enemy'. One also heard a lot of remarks such as 'the Serbs are in dan-

ger'. We used to laugh and ask 'how?' It was in 1989 that we saw the export of the revolutionary Serb ideology and there were many rumours being spread around. We didn't take it seriously to tell you the truth, although the Slovaks used to warn us, 'You are laughing now, but wait till you see whether you really have something to laugh about'."

The reality that was to unfold was met with disbelief not just by the Bosnians but the world as well. It was Dr Haroon Schachat told *the Weekly*, a reality that could only be interpreted as genocide. Schachat worked as a surgeon at the public hospital in Zenica, which lies about 72 km away from the Bosnian capital Sarajevo. Sometimes he used to work for three consecutive days, 24 hours a day without a break, when there was an unexpected flood of cases.

The surgeon confirmed that most of the cases treated in the hospital were innocent civilians — mostly women and children and the elderly from surrounding villages who became the targets of indiscriminate Serb attacks. According to Schachat, the Serb attacks reflected a desire to ridicule, tantalise and torture "the other" as well as to gradually destroy them. "I saw one person with tattoos and writing all over his extremely thin body. He was a victim of the torture camps."

Schachat also spoke of the special centre set up near the hospital for the treatment of traumatised rape victims. Girls as young as 13 and 14 years old became pregnant through rape and were forced

to give birth. The US-based Human Rights Watch's 1995 report on Women's Human Rights claims that "rapists attempt to impregnate their victims and compel them to carry the pregnancy to term as an added form of suffering and humiliation".

Yet the degradation of women was not the only motivation for rape, according to the report. "We found that rape of women in civilian communities has been deployed as a tactical weapon to terrify civilian communities or to achieve 'ethnic cleansing,'" the report reads.

Adrian Bash, who worked for 17 years as an advisor in the Yugoslav presidential office in Belgrade prior to the outbreak of the war, told *the Weekly* that the ideological foundation of the Serb offensive and that of the Nazi regime in the 1930s and 1940s were strikingly similar. Bash highlighted the ideals of the superiority of the Serb race, the need to defend the "purity" of Serb territory and the religious legitimization of its racist agenda. When the ethnic tensions were intensifying in the former Yugoslavia, the Serbs sought Bash's help and political support. He refused and was forced to escape using different aliases and disguises until he arrived in Egypt as a refugee.

Bash said that "the Serb ethnic agenda should have been enough proof of the inevitability of a genocide". He insisted that the Serb government was bent on implementing its ethnic cleansing policy in the name of "Greater Serbia" at any cost, "even to the extent that all pacifist

Serbs who were publicly anti-nationalist were persecuted. Thirty-five of Serbia's greatest intellectuals fled the country before the outbreak of the war because they did not want to be collaborators," he said.

According to Bash, the intent was to abolish all traces of "the other", the non-Serb. "When the Serbs attacked villages, they did not only kill civilians, they also attempted to destroy all evidence of their ethnic, religious, cultural and intellectual background," he said. "This was pre-meditated with the objective of mass destruction of a people because of their non-Serb origin."

Whilst the War Crimes Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia is in the process of investigating the many allegations of human rights abuses on all sides, many Bosnians are sceptical of its impartiality and commitment to exposing the entire "truth". Bosnian Ambassador Hadrovich said, "Members of the international community are reluctant to proceed with the prosecution of criminals and the investigation of human rights abuses because they all have blood on their hands."

Bash made it clear that the criminals in the Bosnian war needed to be brought to justice. "While I don't blame the Serb people, I believe that the Serb Science Academy played a huge role in scheming the future of 'Greater Serbia' and that fascist leaders such as [Serbian President Slobodan] Milosevic should be tried," he said. "Unless the war crimes tribunal successfully brings to trial the perpetrators of genocide, it will be suicide for Europe. It will send off to the rest of the world the message that supporters of neo-fascism can get away with military destruction legitimised by their nationalistic ideologies."

Cuba's brothers of betrayal

Cuba shot down two planes belonging to the opposition last Sunday, reminding the world that Havana remains a dilemma for US presidents, writes Gamal Nkrumah

Can the American electorate be sidetracked by Cuba? US President Bill Clinton perhaps hopes the latest Cuban crisis will deflect criticism at home. Riendro Alarcón de Quesada, former Cuban foreign minister and currently speaker of the Cuban parliament, directly linked the current crisis to this year's American presidential election. The largest Cuban-American communities are found in Florida, New York and New Jersey, states that are crucial for Clinton to secure during his re-election bid in November.

The Miami-based Cuban opposition group, Brothers to the Rescue (BTR), sent three planes to invade Cuban airspace on 24 February and a few minutes after their incursion, two were gunned down by Cuban MiG-29 fighters in Cuban territorial waters. The BTR's planes are based at the Ops-Locke airport in Florida. The group makes regular sorties into Cuban airspace and drops leaflets calling for the overthrow of the regime of Cuban President Fidel Castro.

"I'm in Cuba because I want to denounce, to world public opinion, the real character of the Brothers to the Rescue," said Juan Pablo Roque, a former Cuban fighter pilot who defected to the US and joined the BTR in Florida four years ago. Roque, now back in Cuba, asserted that anti-Castro paratroopers were currently training in the Florida Everglades and were supplying arms to anti-Castro forces in Cuba.

Both the US and Cuba claim that their air defence identification zones extend for 200 miles to the 24th parallel. The Americans say that the Cubans are violating international law. The Cubans predictably disagree. While Washington claims that the two BTR planes were in international airspace when they were shot down, Havana insists that they were not. De Quesada was categorical that incursions into Cuban airspace are unacceptable.

The BTR last sent sorties on 9 and 13 January 1996. US Secretary of State Warren Christopher is adamant that the BTR is a "humanitarian" organisation. "It is not a humanitarian relief agency," Cuba's ambassador to Cairo, Jorge Manjón Lavigne told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "It is a fake organisation and a cover for counter-revolutionaries."

The chairman of the Cuban-American Pilots' Association, Jorge Domínguez, disclosed that the US Federal Aviation Agency had issued new warnings regarding Cuba only three weeks ago. "Cuba made it clear that it was going to attack any US plane that invaded its airspace," said Ambassador Lavigne. "Only Israel and Uzbekistan sided with the US in opposing the lifting of sanctions."

the focus from where the Cessnas were shot down to why they were shot down in the first place. She is pushing for "a way to condemn the heinous, blatant disregard of international law". China, though, is frustrating Albright's efforts to push through harsh Security Council reprimands against Cuba. Can China just mind its own business? No, not if America is hounding it on purportedly unfair trade practices and gross human rights violations.

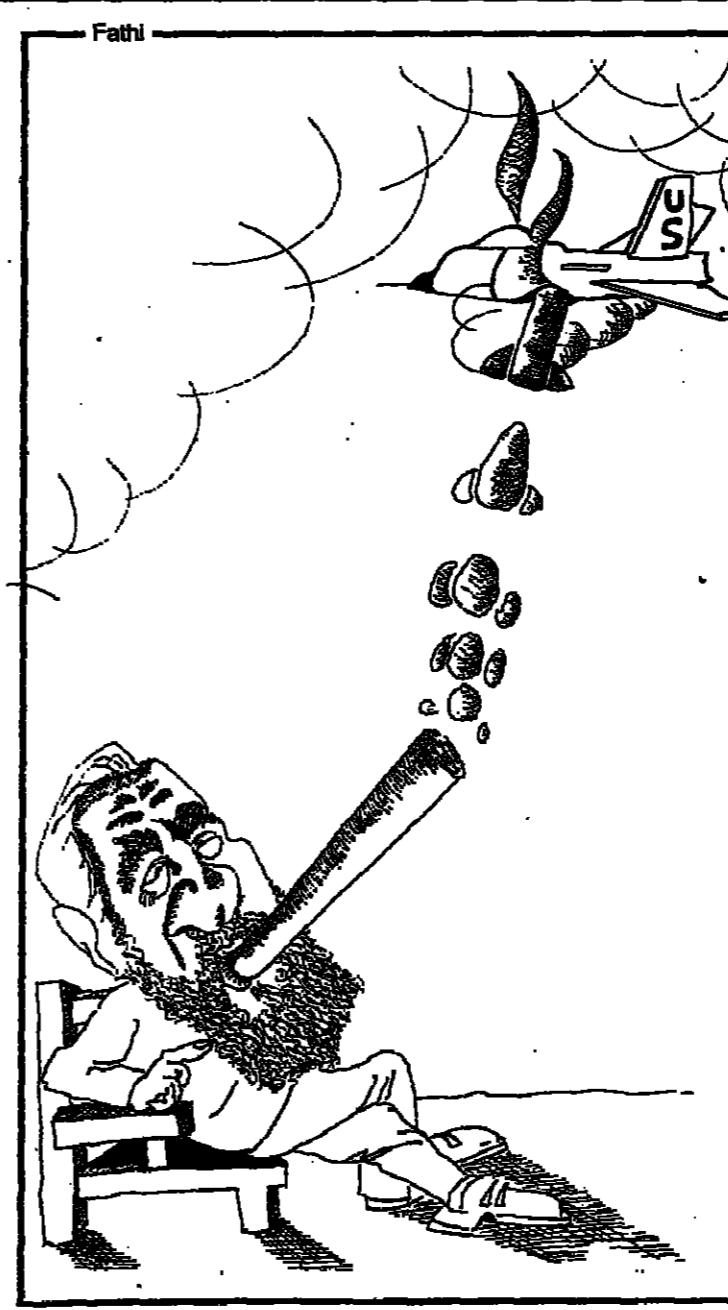
America's Cuban policy is directed by the so-called Cuban Democracy Act. Clinton said the attack is "further evidence that Havana has become more desperate in its efforts to deny freedom to the people of Cuba".

There is widespread understanding of the Cubans' defence of their territorial integrity and sovereignty in the Third World. Albright, who happens to be president of the Security Council for the month of February, is busy lobbying to ensure the South's support for the American standpoint. Not all Latin American countries are sympathetic to the Cuban cause. Chile regrets the loss of human lives, said Chilean ambassador to the UN, Juan Somavia. "From a humanitarian standpoint, the decision to attack militarily unarmed civilian aircraft is condemnable whether this act occurred within or outside Cuban airspace."

Christopher warned that America was not going to wait for others to punish Cuba. "We will not limit ourselves to multilateral action, but we will be considering actions the US can take on its own," he explained.

About 30 per cent of Cuban trade is currently with neighbouring Caribbean and Latin American countries. The main investors in the Cuban economy now come from Canada and Latin American and European nations. With 750,000 tourists visiting Cuba annually, and a reinvigorated agricultural sector, the Cuban economy can withstand the economic embargo, says Havana. "The Cuban economy has picked up fast since the recession which peaked in 1993," said Ambassador Lavigne in Cairo.

In the post-Cold War era, most of America's Western European allies, together with a considerable fraction of America's business community, feel that the policy of upholding the sanctions against Cuba are redundant. In 1995, for the fourth year running, the UN General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to end the trade embargo imposed on the Caribbean island-nation. Only Israel and Uzbekistan sided with the US in opposing the lifting of sanctions.



African Americans looking south

Farrakhan's tour of Africa and the Middle East has set off a firestorm of debate within the African-American community over the need for a black perspective on United States foreign policy, writes Keith Jennings

Minister Louis Farrakhan, the leader of the African-American militant group, the Nation of Islam, toured a number of African and Asian countries recently. His visits to some of the more ruthless one-party, one-leader states and the reported statement that Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Gaddafi was going to give \$1 billion to support a domestic Muslim lobby in the United States, have placed on the defensive the progressive African Americans who supported the Million Man March. They perceived the march as being larger than Farrakhan.

In the past, because of the leadership and activities of individuals such as Paul Robeson, W E B Du Bois, Ida B Wells, Ralph Bunche, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr, and the causes and institutions they represented, it was almost always assumed that African Americans were in solidarity with other oppressed people, who were also locked into poverty and despair and fighting against imperialist oppression. This was the case because it was generally believed that the experience in America with slavery, lynching, segregation and political repression uniquely prepared African Americans to be more sensitive to, and appreciative of, the difficult and often complicated human rights situations prevailing throughout the international community, especially on the African continent.

However, during the Cold War, the prevailing view of most American policy-makers was that African Americans should stick to civil rights and leave foreign policy matters alone. The racism reflected in this view was connected to the embarrassment the US often suffered when, in international forums, the issue of racial discrimination and the social condition of blacks was raised by leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania who were courageous enough to speak out on such a thorny subject.

Farrakhan's visits to Libya, Sudan, Iran, Liberia, Gabon, Ghana, South Africa and Nigeria, among other countries, just after the triumphant Million Man March, raise numerous questions regarding the absence of a clear foreign policy direction among African-American leadership.

Of course those defending the US State Department's view of what is going on in some of those countries will immediately condemn Farrakhan for meddling in foreign affairs or for merely having the audacity to speak to leaders of those "outlaw" states, which in Washington's opinion include the number one, two and three ranked supporters of international terrorism and continue to stand outside the community of nations. Among other nations which oppose rights-promoting, Britain has banned Farrakhan from entering its territory but regularly allows fascists such as France's Jean-Marie Le Pen to visit.

African Americans have to understand these and other multi-layered contradictions which exist in international affairs. And those concerned about human rights and solidarity must not allow themselves to fall into any camps uncritically.

What should the African-American community's posture be regarding the countries Farrakhan visited, their leaderships and the grassroots movements for human rights and democracy?

In Sudan, the largest country in Africa with a population of about 25 million, there is massive evidence of torture and incommunicado detention. Restrictions exist on the freedoms of speech, religion and the press — all independent press was banned after the 1989 coup. The suppression of ethnic and religious minorities and the pervasive discrimination against women are also well known.

In addition, the North's genocidal war against the Southern Sudanese has continued unabated since the introduction of its contested version of Islamic *Shari'a* law. Urban clearance programmes to remove the large non-Muslim population of war-displaced Southern and Nubian people from greater Khartoum to isolated sites far from urban areas has continued. Laws and policies which discriminate against non-Muslims and women are ruthlessly enforced by the military government led by General Omar Hassan Al-Bashir, who is under the domination of the National Islamic Front.

In Nigeria, Africa's most populous country of over 110 million people, the recent political elections that Oguni leader Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others top a dismal human rights record. The well documented actions of the military dictatorship of General Sani Abacha may well lead to a bloody civil war as the ongoing crisis and the military's handling of it have given rise to ethnic and regional tension and hardened the separation between the north and the south. A conflict in Nigeria would automatically spill over into several other neighbouring countries and wreak havoc in much of West Africa.

The military government of the country's 1993 elections that Chief Moshood Abiola won was followed by the brutal suppression of the pro-democracy movement's campaign to end the military dictatorship. General Abacha disbanded the national and state legislatures, removed the elected civilian governors and banned all political activity, while at the same time professing his intention to return the country to democracy.

The continued crackdown on the Ogun people on behalf of transnational corporate giant Shell Oil is a tragic example of how neo-colonialism really works.

In Iran the persecution of religious minorities is ongoing. In addition, large numbers of arbitrary arrests, summary executions, disappearances and the absence of guarantees essential for the protection of the right to a fair trial have all been cited and condemned by the UN.

The truth is, Farrakhan's foreign policy perspectives reflect a very narrow stratum of black public opinion. His views have gained such prominence now because the entrenched, institutionalised racism within foreign policy institutions has meant that few legitimate black voices exist on foreign policy matters. Farrakhan's view also exists because of a clear lack of accountability within the African-American community that would require people claiming to speak in the interest of the community to address problems directly and honestly.

Following on from the Million Man March, Farrakhan has stepped into an obvious vacuum in black leadership, and has done an outstanding job of taking advantage of that vacuum, by explaining some aspects of the realities confronting African Americans in the US to an international audience.

The writer is the executive director of the African American Human Rights Foundation.



Courting disaster

As a Hamas bomb exploded in Jerusalem on Sunday, the road to peace was again paved in blood. Peres vowed to avenge the 25 Israelis who died, but what of the 29 Palestinians who were massacred at a Hebron mosque on 5 January? And what of the thousands of other Arabs and Israelis who have died over the years as a result of Israeli intention and supposedly savvy decision-making?

And yet, the peace process has continued, with Israel dragging its heels to the negotiating table, laying conditions instead of considering offers, while setting ultimatums for Arama's self-rule government — again, all in the name of peace.

With his back to the wall, Arafat has responded to Peres' demands, the anti-Israeli activists are disarmed or "risk endangering his authority," by arresting 120 Hamas members. But these demands take on a new light following the shooting of an Arab-American by armed Jewish bystanders when his car crashed into a bus stop in Jerusalem, killing at least one. Justice in Israel, when in the interest of the state, is apparently swift enough to completely bypass the judicial system in favour of the vigilante.

As a security precaution, Peres closed off the border for a day, leaving nearly 60,000 Palestinians unable to reach their workplaces. This, however, is not the most prudent method of keeping a disenchanted and poor, populous optimistic about peace. Rather, a settlement on the Golan issue would at least be a tangible step to peace upon which others could be built.

The scenario, as it stands now, however, offers no clear conclusions. Hamas' egregious attack comes in retaliation for the death of Yehuda Ayash, its bomb-maker. Israel, with an eye on security, is again opting for the sword instead of the word to resolve conflicts. And Arafat, the placator is scurrying around, attempting to keep all the parties content. Clearly, the hands of all parties involved are bloodied, but when will Israelis wash theirs?

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An Arab role in Israel?

With opponents of the peace process expressing themselves ever more violently, Mohamed Sid-Ahmed questions whether the Arab parties should not intervene in internal Israeli affairs, exactly as Israel intervenes in internal Arab affairs

Can the Arabs live with the implications of this?

Israel faces the same dilemma, albeit from a Zionist perspective. It is taking the opportunity of the hundredth anniversary of the publication of Theodore Herzl's ideological manifesto *Der Judenstaat* to re-visit Zionism in the Middle East. The militant, fanatical brand of Zionism which sees Israel as an ironclad citadel which can only feed Arab hostility, can need not be the case, however, for a toned-down version based on economic incentives rather than military deterrence, that is, on markets rather than battlefield.

This forces the Arabs with the need to come up with an alternative ideology that can help them meet the new challenges.

The Arabs will have to use all the cards available to them to face an unsatisfactory peace without becoming prey to frustration, extremism and terrorism. So far, peace in the Middle East has not eliminated the contradictions, but has simply displaced them so that they no longer operate mainly between Israel and the Arab states but within Israel itself on the one hand and Arab societies on the other. Thanks to its astute use of the democratic game, Israel has succeeded, at least so far, despite its occasional eruption of violence within its own ranks, in exposing the Arabs as the party which has been torn apart by this displacement of the contradictions. Unless the Arabs make use of Israel's internal contradictions, the latter is bound to retain the upper hand.

Friends few but fast

By Naguib Mahfouz

What distinguished Al-Harif from any other circle of friends was the human, artistic, intellectual and political elements that went into the making of the group. Unfortunately the circle has now dwindled. Some — Amr El-Dalibi, Salah Jaimi and Assem Helmi, whom we called the captain, have passed away. Others changed the direction of their lives. Mustafa Mahmoud, for instance, became a Sufi.

Mustafa's transformation began with a telescope. One evening he invited us to his home. He made us look at the stars. To Mustafa the brilliance of the sky was testimony of the greatness and glory of God.

The circle of Al-Harif was not limited by age. Salah Jaimi, for instance, was significantly younger than I am, though sadly he died at an early age. The surviving members of the group who must regularly till this day are Tawfiq Salih and a newcomer, Yehia El-Rakawi, who has made a great impression. Ahmed, Muzher, Bahget Ottoman and Gamal Shafiq do not meet with us regularly anymore. Muzher due to health reasons and the others because they are busy. Adel Kamel now lives permanently in the US. Al-Harif, then, has now dwindled to Yehia El-Rakawi, myself and Tawfiq Salih. We meet regularly in Salih's home and share his wife's lentil soup. I can honestly testify that it is the best lentil soup in town.

The writer is a former chairman of the People's Assembly Housing Committee.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Soltany.

Old laws come home to roost

Milad Hanna views the new housing law as a step in the direction of alleviating the current housing crisis

The current year began with a rash of events — a cabinet reshuffle, the appointment of a new prime minister, Kamal El-Ganzouri, who inaugurated his term of office by passing three important pieces of legislation over three successive days.

What I wish to deal with here is the long-awaited legislation that aims to rationalise the relationship between the landlord and tenant and in doing so, solve those seemingly intractable problems that have dogged us since World War II, when rents were frozen at their 1941 levels. Shortly afterwards, the concept generally referred to as a permanent lease was introduced, depriving the landlord of the right to evict tenants upon termination of a lease.

This situation, which has remained virtually unchanged for over half a century, has driven real estate entrepreneurs — certainly since the beginning of the 1980s — to invest in the construction of apartment blocks that could subsequently be sold off as privately owned lots, known as condominiums. Gone was the system of letting unfurnished flats. If landlords rented out their property at all it would be as furnished flats, which were not subject to the controls imposed by the current rent laws. The result, according to a census conducted in 1986, is one million vacant flats in Egypt's metropolitan areas and 800,000 vacant flats in rural areas.

Such statistics have led to mounting public pressure for changes in legislation that would encourage property owners to open up this enormous, unexploited housing stock, with an estimated value of some LE80-100 billion.

The new bill, number 4 of 1996, is unlikely to solve the housing crisis though it marks a modest beginning in the right direction. At its heart are four articles. Taken together they embody the spirit of Civil Code 131 of 1948 which stipulates that "the contract constitutes the legal edifice between contracting parties". The new legislation is designed to ensure that market mechanisms alone will regulate rent levels and the period of the lease. For flats subject to this law, rent controls and the perpetual lease will be a thing of the past.

The law, which for once is explicitly worded and a model of clarity, will apply to what I term virgin housing, i.e. newly constructed housing and flats that currently exist but which have never been leased prior to the date the law comes into effect. It will also apply to those properties that have been subject to earlier housing laws provided that the tenant voluntarily declares that he does not want to renew his lease. This declaration will release the landlord and his property from the old constraints.

Naturally, for a tenant to consent to liberate a flat that has been subject to rent controls for decades, he or she would expect some form of compensation. The amount would be negotiated with the landlord, and much, of course, will depend on the condition of the flat and the negotiating parties' personal circumstances, not to mention their negotiating skills. For example, suppose one had leased a flat in Zamalek, Garden City or Maadi, in an old but well-maintained building, and the rent had been frozen at, say, LE10 since 1935. One could, upon deciding that one no longer needs the flat, offer to relinquish the lease

to the landlord in return for, say, LE100,000. Once freed from his obligations under the terms and conditions of the former lease, the landlord could let out the flat for LE3,000 or \$1,000 a month, for a period of five years, depending on the conditions of the market.

This law, the executive ordinance for which is currently being drafted, will encourage landlords who own condominiums or building blocks in which there are vacant flats to lease their properties unfurnished. Thousands of flats will be put onto the market, constituting a major first step towards solving the housing crisis.

The government is also studying other connected legislation. Specifically, this relates to raising rents that have been frozen at ridiculously low rates when compared to the going market rents for furnished or unfurnished flats. Indeed, many landlords complain that the income generated from their properties is less than is needed to pay the salaries of doormen and guards let alone finance necessary maintenance. Levels of inflation over the past 20 years have made the situation dire for those families whose income depends on the properties in lease.

Frozen rents give landlords no opportunity to recuperate the costs of maintenance and as a consequence, they are allowing their buildings to deteriorate. In fact, some seem to cherish the hope that their buildings will one day collapse. They would then have at their disposal a fortune in land, the value of which has increased over a hundred-fold in the last 20 years. It is small wonder that they recent tenants who have enjoyed the comfort of rent controls

for so many years, and who are perhaps grumbling to them about up-keep.

The only solution is for tenants themselves to cover the costs of upkeep and maintenance — the salaries of the doormen and guards, water consumption, the maintenance of water pumps and plumbing, the maintenance of the lifts, the cleaning and lighting of hallways and stairwells etc. I proposed a bill to this effect in 1983, when I was chairman of the People's Assembly Housing Committee. When the Assembly voted it down, I decided to leave parliamentary life all together.

Another proposal which will be put before our legislators this year pertains to the right to bequeath the lease of rented flats. Under the old law, virtually any relative, even two or three times removed, had the right to inherit a rent-controlled lease as long as they had been living with the former tenant for at least a year before his death. Under the new bill this right will be restricted to the spouse and children, i.e. first degree relatives.

This year augurs well for bringing real estate laws in line with market forces. Yet this will not immediately contribute to solving the problem of providing affordable housing for the poor and low-income sectors of society. While increased housing supply should contribute to reducing rent levels, we will still need legislation that will cover subsidised and low-cost housing. Such legislation is in place in most countries of Western Europe. It has yet to take root in Egyptian housing policy.

The writer is a former chairman of the People's Assembly Housing Committee.

It initiates by holding a monopoly over setting the agenda. Here lies the real danger, because there are no formal means to guard against the intrusion of this trend into the deepest oases of freedom, such as the judiciary.

The situation in Egypt may have not reached this level of fragility. But there are signs it is slipping in this direction. Balances within the Egyptian judiciary, as measured by rulings on issues of fundamental rights, may not be said to have reached the point of equilibrium between outright fundamentalist polarisation. But the danger is there.

Will Law 3 be able to stem the tide of fundamentalist politicisation of the apostasy issue? Will this law be enough to check the fundamentalist politicisation of even broader issues through the judiciary? Obviously not.

One immediate mission in defence of the judiciary lies within the mandate of this crucial institution itself — a vigorous implementation of its own system of checks on professionalism and integrity.

But the greater mission must be mandated to the intellectual community. The only way to really stem the tide of fanaticism of all sorts, especially religious fanaticism, as located within the arena of agenda-setting. The more visibility shown by a given culture, the greater its immunity to fanaticism. And the more serious, fresh and innovative the agenda set by the intellectual community, the more a nation can resist being dragged into exercises in fanaticism, absurdities and moral/misleading decisions.

Here as well lies yet another irony. Intellectuals in Egypt are dragged into this lengthy debate against *hesba*. This puts them in a defensive position and renders them even more vulnerable to abuses by religious fanatics

Close up

Salama A. Salama

Violence breeds violence

Acts of revenge, committed by militant groups affiliated to Mossad and suicide groups linked to Hamas and other hardline Palestinian factions continue unabated. Suicide attacks, like the recent explosions in Jerusalem and Ashkelon, will continue to feature in the news, claiming the lives of innocent civilians from both sides. And they will undoubtedly have adverse repercussions on the Arab-Israeli peace process.

The latest suicide attack in Israel simply reinforces these words. Certainly it came as no surprise given that everyone had braced themselves for some form of retaliation following Mossad's assassination of Fathi Al-Shaqqa in Malta and Yehya Ayyash in Gaza. Many were, however, shocked that the Mossad killings came at a time when the Palestinian National Authority and Hamas were locked in negotiations. The PNA-Hamas talks, which began before the Palestinian legislative council elections, focused on ending attacks and establishing a period of peace during which the Palestinian people might be given a chance to build up institutions, exercise self-rule and move steadily towards the final stages of negotiations which would have paved the way for the creation of a Palestinian state.

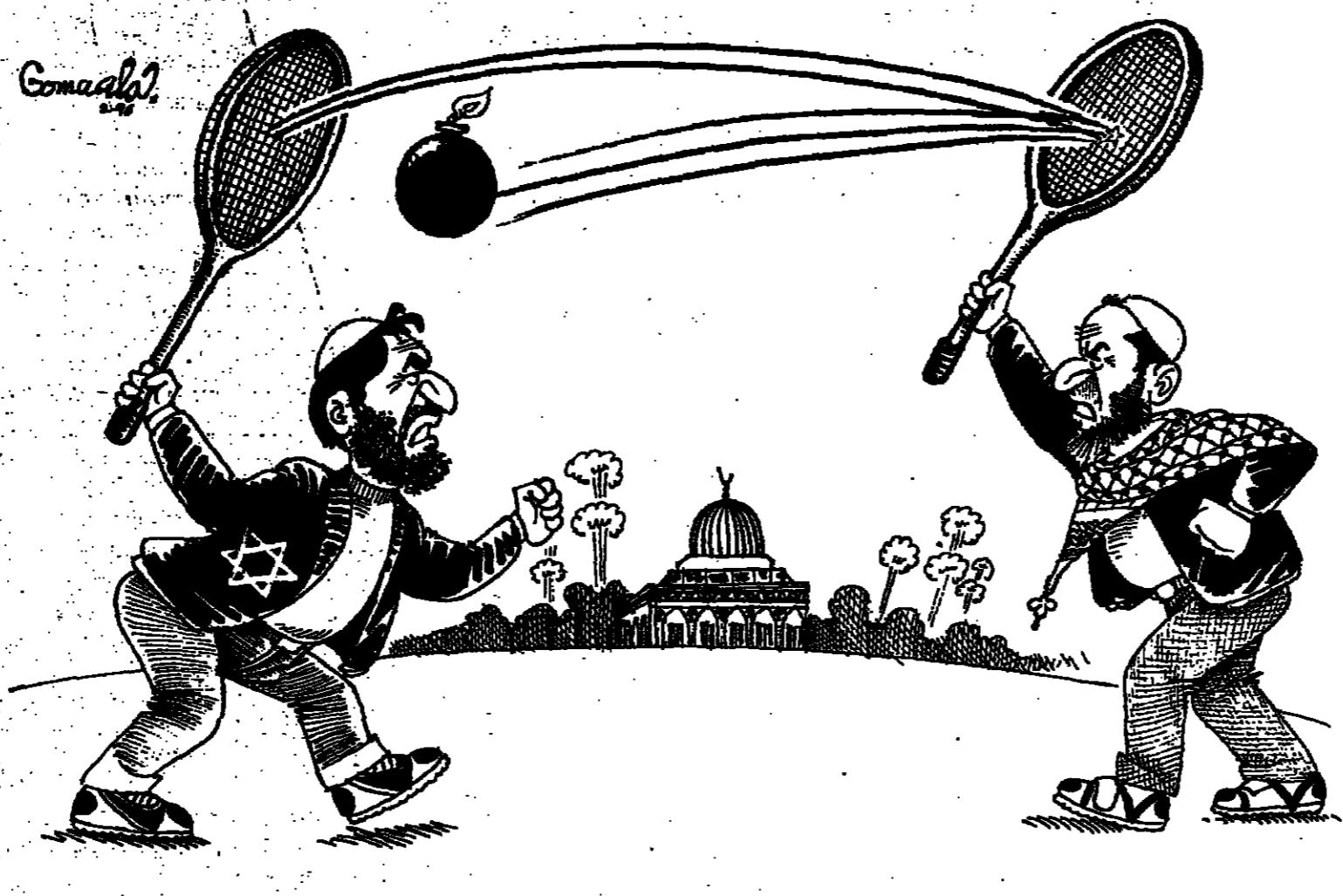
The latest bombings in Israel are likely to provoke widespread condemnation. They happened in the heart of a crowded city killing dozens of passengers and pedestrians including children. Nonetheless, the demands of logic require that we analyse the factors and circumstances that drove certain Palestinian factions to commit such acts. Nor, in condemning this outrage, should we forget that the Israeli government's security network is guilty of similar acts of violence. Israeli security forces continue to hatch schemes to eliminate individuals whom they consider a threat to Israel, or whom they think oppose the peace talks.

The Israeli authorities also impose tough security measures, including the closure of Israeli borders overlooking the West Bank and Gaza, thereby preventing tens of thousands of Palestinian workers from entering Israel. This amounts to an economic blockade that persists for days and weeks on end. By persisting in such actions Israel creates the atmosphere of violence and tension that is a fertile breeding ground for suicide attacks.

Neither the Palestinian National Authority nor Yasser Arafat can be made accountable for Israel's internal security, particularly given persistent Israeli attempts to curb the influence of the PNA in the West Bank and Gaza. A weakened PNA only fuels anti-Israeli sentiments, prompting many Palestinians to accuse Arafat of kowtowing to Israeli demands while his countrymen face unemployment, destitution, and the absence of basic services.

To ensure the stability necessary to guarantee the success of peace efforts and prevent the recurrence of violent incidents the PNA and the Israeli authorities must come to a mutual agreement that would include the cessation of similar acts perpetrated by the Israeli intelligence network. This is the only way to ensure that suicide attacks committed by hardline Palestinian groups inside Israel come to an end. Such a guarantee would limit the power of extremist groups on both sides and deprive them of their ability to seek the kind of revenge that claims innocent victims, victims whose only hope is, ironically, the peace process.

Gomash!

**Lost in a state of illusions**

Only when the rhetoric of an emerging Palestinian state gives way to realities on the ground will Palestinians be in a position to escape the impasse that has confounded their hopes of statehood for a generation, argues Edward Said

Around 20 January, and for two or three days, the Western media had a picnic discussing, celebrating and echoing one another over the Palestinian elections. At most there was an admission that the elections were part of a "complex" reality, although the very fact that they took place seemed to be quite enough of a good thing, without anyone bothering too much about the actual circumstances (i.e. the Israeli occupation and the autocratic practices) that seriously flawed them.

That there was a dramatic level of participation is undeniable, and reflects a deep-seated, indeed urgent wish on the part of Palestinians for a chance to hold off their fate. That was the main positive message of the elections. That there were no political parties or real platforms; that Arafat — like most Arab rulers — made himself and his minions into the inevitable winners; that unsavoury candidates emerged; and that the Legislative Council still had no really defined duties; all these were the negatives which effectively *bustress* Israeli plans for the Occupied Territories.

Shimon Peres reminded Arafat that his talk of a Palestinian state was a dream, with no basis in fact. And then he asked sarcastically what more the Palestinians wanted, since he had given them an autonomous area (with Israeli sovereignty) comprising 27 per cent of Palestine land.

After three days of international attention, the Palestinian story disappeared. Undeterred, Arafat, who takes himself very seriously indeed, had himself sworn in on 12 February, as a way of preempting the Council, which had still not met; this added more fantasy to the pathos of the occasion. Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) declared that the newly-elected council would soon declare an independent Palestinian state, as if everyone had forgotten that in November 1988 an independent state had, in fact, been declared by the National Council in Algiers. How many declarations of a state are required before a state-like the game — finally appears, and why must Arafat, frantically rubbing his lamp, be the model for everything?

That the Israelis are not readers of the *Thousand And One Nights* is clear. In the month since the elections they have closed Ramallah, Bir Zeit, and Bethlehem for all sorts of "security" reasons, the net effect of which has been to show Palestinians that, despite elections and Yasir Arafat's eloquent declarations, they were the masters

Nearly every day since 20 January a Palestinian has been killed by the Israeli; land confiscation and settlement-building continue; and repeated violations of the Oslo agreements have occurred. All of this occurs as the West Bank gets chopped up further — in mid-February, for example, a security fence was built between Qalqilya and Tulkarem.

Gaza is more depressed economically than it has ever been; unemployment is higher than a year ago; speculators and real estate sharks have used the land for their own benefit while thousands of refugees inhabit the sprawling hovels of Shati and Jabalya camps. Not for want of money, though. Roughly \$40 to \$50 million dollars flows in every month, but nobody except perhaps Arafat knows where the money goes. Most of it goes to his eight or nine security forces. In addition, he now has formed a commercial company with Khaled Slem as an instrument for skimming money off local enterprises.

Not to be outdone, "dovish" Israel itself that visionary of peace Peres, and his smooth-talking deputy Yossi Beilin, are beginning to campaign on the basis of a platform that takes the Oslo Accords as the final settlement. Here I can do no better than to quote the respected Israeli commentator Haim Baran:

"Most Israelis, Likud supporters included, treat the Oslo Accords as a *fait accompli*, and brace themselves for the final phase. Yossi Beilin, Peres' main ally in the cabinet, is consolidating the new consensus. Most settlers will stay put; Israel will continue to deal with Yasir Arafat, expecting him to erase the Palestinian Charter and to fight 'Islamic terrorism' on Israel's behalf; Israel will maintain the River Jordan as a line of defense, and no settlement in the Jordan Valley is to be disbanded; the huge settlement of Ma'aleh Edomim is to be annexed; united Jerusalem (which constitutes 25 per cent of the West Bank) will be the 'eternal capital' of Israel."

Against these harsh realities backed up by Israeli power and resolve, Arafat's strutting posture and declarations amount to very little indeed. Even if Israel were to be deterred or stopped from going through with the current Labour plan, a real Palestinian state cannot emerge from so hopelessly corrupt and incompetent a start as this. The disease infecting our society is very deep, since most of us by now have lost the ability to discriminate between fact and fantasy. Thus, language has lost its meaning: when you have a leadership that has led the

Palestinian people from one disaster to another, from Amman, to Beirut, to Tunis, to Baghdad, to Gaza, all the time proclaiming its new victories, something has very seriously gone wrong in the Palestinian psyche, which seems to have an almost unlimited tolerance for the follies of our great leaders.

Israel could covet nothing more than a leader who concedes everything to them, just to save his own skin, and who will never be able to convert himself into a serious opponent of the nation, Israel, which has dispossessed his people, occupied their territory, oppressed Palestinians and treated them with contempt for half a century.

As with most things in politics, the issue between them and us is a moral one, not strictly a matter of how many tanks or planes they have. Our leaders never behave with the conviction of their own right; indeed Arafat shamelessly used the White House platform offered to him in 1993 to utter a cringing, whimpering speech, full of apologies and half truths offered up to Israel and the US, who continue to oppress his people to this day.

I should like to remind my readers that Nelson Mandela, whose organisation had been completely defeated by the South African regime, whose colleagues were either in exile or killed, and who himself was prisoner for 28 years, never compromised on the truth of his struggle or its original political goal of one person, one vote. It was this simple fact, not the possession of an air force nor secret meetings with Berlin or Sarid, that brought about the defeat of apartheid. Apartheid, in the end, was morally confounded by, and compelled to submit to, the greater truth of the *human* power of Mandela's courage and principle.

I cannot understand why our intellectuals and people of conscience, with a few exceptions like Haider Abu-Shafei, continue to pretend to believe in a peace process that with the passing of every day indicate itself as unjust. When I first met Professor Ismail Shahak years ago, he told me, from the standpoint of a fearless critic of Israeli policies against Palestinians, that the PLO never understood Israeli society. Recently, he told me that the reason Israel respects and fears Hezbollah and Hafez Al-Assad is that Israelis respect strength, especially if their opponents are courageous enough to hurt them militarily or morally. The PLO mentality, he said quite correctly, seeks favours from Israel through non-confrontation, except during the Intifada.

Of course, this attitude of servility which always accompanies the feelings of someone whose main concern is not the good of his people but his own survival and profit, has communicated itself to our Israeli enemies, whom Arafat persists in calling his "friends". And the net result is the Oslo peace process, one of whose main components is letting Palestinians feel that Israel can do what it wants, when it wants, how it wants.

I have been criticised for being too pessimistic and for not presenting alternatives. Well, let me be very plain: the only alternative to what we have now is to pay serious attention to the meaning of words, to the proper conviction in the right of our cause, and an end to the rule of the present leadership. I see no future at all in the constant reiteration of outright lies that try to convince us that we have won an important victory in Gaza and the West Bank, when every indication in fact and on the ground is that Israel has done *everything* in its power to provide a "settlement" for the Palestinian problem without in fact giving up its power and authority over the land or its people. To say otherwise is to prevaricate.

We have never learned how to build our power as a people, to build and to accumulate. Our leaders have not been interested in a winning strategy that puts the good of the whole over the wishes of the few. In effect, this has meant that we are still without institutions — since despots think of institutions as a threat to their power, and we have done very little to construct a functioning society that could truly grow and develop.

One would have to be a fool to deny the unimaginably difficult circumstances in which we find ourselves as a people, divided, scattered, without real independence anywhere. But we must first have a serious and collective critique of the policies and the leaders that brought us to this pass, and we must be able to assign considerable responsibility to ourselves and our feelings, not just to our enemies and their conspiracies. As I said, this cannot be done unless we use language and reason to address the reality, responsibly and seriously. It is of no use saying that we have a "state" when in reality we are about as far from one as we have ever been. Words, therefore, must be used soberly, with attention paid to the objective reality. Arafat and his partners use words as if they lived in a dream of their own making; Peres was not wrong. When will we wake up?

To The Editor**Education reforms**

Sir: Ibrahim Nafie's reflections on the education system in our country (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 15-21 February) were very interesting. Though Nafie tried to dot the i's and cross the t's as regards ways education can be enhanced, there are a few important points that should be taken into consideration if we are to achieve real progress in this field.

The teacher should be regarded as the cornerstone in any endeavour to reform education. The painful fact is that teachers in Egypt work in very difficult conditions. They are underpaid. The system of promoting teachers is defective: they are loaded with excessive clerical work and they suffer from a lack of equipment and teaching aids.

Teacher development cannot be achieved only by sending a few teachers abroad for a three-month training period. It is a continuing process that needs much more thought and planning and, later, careful application. Unfortunately, there is often much disparity between thought and action. Everything should be calculated. We've already had enough leaps in the dark.

Finally, let's get rid of those who are hindering our progress, those who only talk and do nothing, those who are only interested in finding faults with others and those who are enemies of creativity and innovation.

Rasam Hanna Wahba
Salem Language School
Assuit

America's Saddam

Sir: Security Council Resolution 986 permits a partial lifting of sanctions imposed on Iraq allowing it to export billions of US dollars worth of oil. Exports must be transported through the pipeline to Turkey. One third of the profits go to Iraq to meet its humanitarian needs, another third for compensation and the final third to Kurdish Northern Iraq. The UN is in charge of the management and distribution of this money. The US is undoubtedly interested in keep-

ing Saddam Hussein in power, for this may serve the American interests in the Gulf region. The US could exploit Saddam's unforgivable sin of invading Kuwait in the UN which is largely Americanised. Resolution 986 is a grave infringement of Iraq's sovereignty. Arab countries should normalise relations with Iraq.

The Arab perspective should encompass regional interests in order to challenge international economic blocs. Economic development should be the first step.

Ashraf Faragalla Sand
English Language Teacher
Beirut

Nubian charm

Sir: I read with great interest the article entitled "Wonders behind the dam" by Omayma Abdellatif and Nevine El-Aref (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 25-31 January). There are many Nubian monuments which still exist in the old Nubian area. They represent different historical eras of Nubian culture and civilisation. The area attracts visitors from all parts of the world to enjoy its sunny weather and healthy winter climate.

Shukry-Ahmed Bahr

Aswan

Information needed

Sir: It seems the Internet has brought about significant lifestyle changes for those who have access to the service. Most international news publications feature a technology or cyberspace section which keeps one informed of the rapid innovations emerging on-line.

Egypt's initiation into cyberspace has received little media attention. If Egyptians are to take advantage of the endless possibilities which this new technology offers, they must be well-informed. Media attention will generate interest and increase demand for the service.

Mahmoud Saleh
Giza

Reflections By Hani Shukrallah**Suffer the little children**

Terrorism, if one seeks its definition by media and governments' usage of the word, seems to be an all-encompassing term, its application totally dependent on whim and personal predilection. Neither does there seem to be any objective criteria for the degree of moral indignation triggered by acts which could be identified as terrorism — certainly it is not the scale of the violence, and the numbers of non-combatants who suffered as a result that counts. Otherwise, Israeli bombing raids in South Lebanon would have elicited considerably more moral indignation than the suicide attacks by Hamas, of which this week's attack — claiming 25 dead and 80 injured — was amongst the most violent ever. These figures, horrifying when the victims are Israelis, are mere small fry, to be dismissed with a shrug, when they are Palestinians and Lebanese.

One simple definition could be that "terrorism" covers acts of political violence committed by non-state groups and organisations. But that definition makes the term value-free (at least as far as violence of any kind is concerned); state violence could only be deemed morally superior to non-state violence by making the ridiculous assumption that states act morally. In any case, it is clear this is not the definition adopted by world government and media. In terms of sheer brutality and scale of violence, the record of the Afghan Mujaheddin and the Honduras Contras was a 100-fold more brutal and violent than all the acts of violence committed by the Palestinians during three quarters of a century of struggle. Nevertheless, the Mujaheddin were mujaheddin, and the Contras were contras. Palestinians, even when armed only with stones, are invariably terrorists.

The moral duplicity of world governments and media was nowhere more flagrant and too numerous to relate. What is truly amazing is their success — testimony to the Orwellian power of the Western media and to the degree of its subservience to vested interests.

We cannot afford to be cynical however. Nothing reveals the full horror of armed violence as much as the image of a suffering child. One distinctive, and heart-rending, feature of the human species is the extreme vulnerability of its young. Under the best of circumstances, the world is a frightening place for these intelligent and self-conscious little beings. To imagine a child having to cope with the shock of a blast, perhaps a dead and disfigured parent lying alongside it, the unbearable pain of an injury to its tiny body, to be capable of imagining this and not be filled with utter horror is to be something less than human.

And yet, the Western media's cynical manipulation of just this image reveals it, and its hordes of liberal minded, "internationally humanitarian" journalists, photographers and commentators, as something that is much less than human. For the image is the same, the suffering the same, whether the blast is caused by a Hamas-made bomb or an Israeli-American-made missile. The only differences are in terms of scale — tens of children per missile compared to maybe two or three per home-made bomb, and in terms of calculation — cold calculation by prosperous and comfortable commanders whose orders involve no risk or even inconvenience to themselves, compared to suicidal desperation by oppressed, marginalised and brutalised individuals whose acts, more often than not, involve their own lives.

So long as armed violence remains with us, then we must have a moral code that restricts its use. The first and most fundamental principle in this code should be to prohibit violence against non-combatants. Killers and maimers of children should be condemned equally irrespective of the sophistication of the technology they use to kill and maim, irrespective also of the religion, nationality and skin colour of the child whose moment of terror, bewilderment and pain should, and unfortunately does not, break the hardest and coldest heart among us.

Soapbox**Surprise and strain**

Neither the bus explosion in Jerusalem nor the Ashkelon incident came as a surprise since I, like many others, had expected such revenge operations ever since the assassination of Yehya Ayyash. His murder, the recent incidents, Israel's continuing expansion of settlements, the contest between the Likud and Labour parties in releasing racist, anti-Arab statements in their attempts to secure support are all part and parcel of the same thing. They are links in the same chain, and consequently cannot be viewed as discrete entities or analysed as such.

The Israeli concurred with Rabin's wife's assessment of her husband's assassination as being the result of Likud statements. We too must acknowledge that the antagonism, hostility and virtual siege to which Palestinians are constantly subjected arouses in them feelings of contempt and hatred. Against this backdrop we can hardly be surprised when they seek revenge, particularly revenge on those who violate their human rights, prevent their relatives from returning, prevent movement between town and villages — in short, prevent even the possibility of leading a dignified life.

Whether or not we should be surprised by acts of revenge apart it is necessary to say that neither Israel's political practices, nor the statements of Likud leaders, or those of the Israeli foreign minister, nor the provocation of settlers justify acts of violence that target innocents.

Yet I predict that these events will lead to more suppression of Palestinians and a new siege. And Palestinians will have yet more grievances to add to the mountain already in place. Positions will become more extreme, engendering confrontations between the Israeli and Palestinian authorities, making the chain of violence ever more tense.

The writer is director of the Arab Centre for Development and Futuristic Research.



Viva Eva

Nehad Selaiha talks to the Austrian choreographer and dancer Eva-Maria Lerchenberg-Thony about the future of dance-theatre in Egypt



Sartre's *Huis Clos*, as envisaged by Eva-Maria Lerchenberg-Thony

It was not just another theatre workshop. Several foreign artists of international renown, including the inimitable Jozef Szajna, have been invited to Cairo in recent years to communicate their valuable experience to young Egyptian artists within the same framework. But for Hoda Wasfi, the director of Al-Hanager Arts Centre, the Eva-Maria Lerchenberg-Thony dance-theatre workshop gave tangible, indisputable validation for her policy of intensive cultural interaction and exposure.

For the 40 young men and women (all drawn from the Egyptian theatrical fringe) it was a process of self-discovery, a real rebirth. After six weeks of gruelling work, lasting six or seven hours every blessed day of the week, excepting Fridays, they all felt more at home with their bodies and in the world. Hani El-Mittinawi, a young PT instructor and a member of the Shrapnel Free Theatre Group, told me: "There was never any grand abstract talk, no theorisation. She simply showed us what our bodies were capable of: stunningly complex movement. We thought we could never manage them; but she never doubted we could. She gave us confidence and strength and set about analysing them, step by step, teaching us all the time about rhythm and feeling, motive and provocation."

Mona Prince, another member of Shrapnel says: "This workshop has affected all areas of my life. I move, walk and talk differently. When I do belly-dancing now I am always aware of form, muscle control and body discipline. It saves on energy. No waste there."

Another member of the group, Maher Sabri, a self-styled Christ-figure, had a temperature of forty on the last demonstration performance, but rather than let himself be coerced into staying in bed, he bounced onto stage, interminably warming his dancing partners to

mind his dripping nose. When I went backstage at the end to congratulate Eva-Maria (as she came to be affectionately called by everybody at Al-Hanager, including the cafeteria staff), I found her caught in a warm, glowing whirlpool of tears, hugs and laughter; then, suddenly, someone cheered "Viva Eva", sparking off a chain that filled the whole place. The occasion also coincided with her birthday, but the superstitious side of me told me it was no coincidence. When a young, self-effacing female artist pushed into my hands a lovely bunch of pink carnations given to her by lover on St Valentine's Day, asking me urgently to give it to Eva, I was almost sure it was no coincidence. I had forgotten it was also St Valentine's Day.

My daughter always warns me against "gushing"; but in the presence of Eva-Maria (and never mind the surname — with a first name that combines Eve and Miriam who needs it?) how could anyone help it? "She came, saw, and conquered" would be a terribly "gushing" way to describe what she has done. But to say "she came, saw and loved and in leaving she departed having become richer for the experience" would be nearer the truth — though equally full of gush. Eva-Maria Lerchenberg-Thony loved her workshop members as much as they loved her; more importantly, she respected them as artists, even though some of them came to her completely innocent of any knowledge or experience of the bare rudiments of dancing, forcing her to start from "below zero", as she puts it. The six weeks' work was only an initiation process and she is already decided to stick together and continue training along the lines she laid and wait for her.

I attended a few of Eva-Maria Lerchenberg-Thony's training sessions before talking to her and every time she re-

minded me of a yogi. Even before she told me, I had guessed she was an idealist, and known that however eclectic in her styles and sources she would have no truck with the cynical, disruptive gimmicks of postmodernism. Her response to the world is basically romantic, albeit with a good measure of classical austerity and self-discipline. Questioned about her style, she quotes Garcia Lorca's famous saying: "I do not care if what I do is old or new so long as it is me." She passionately believes in the expressive power of movement, its ability to communicate not simply moods and feelings but states of being. Her body language may be conventional in vocabulary, drawing on classical ballet, modern and Asian dance, but her syntax is all her own and has a pronounced mystical tone. Her interpretation of Georg Buechner's *Woyzeck* (which provided the framework for her Egyptian workshop), with music by the French composer Rene Aubry, took the form of a series of epiphanies. It was vastly different from the stunning piece she brought to Cairo in 1989 — an interpretation of Sartre's *Huis Clos* which enraptured everybody and was voted by the international jury and the Egyptian critics the best show of the Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre that year. Whereas *Huis Clos* was frenziedly passionate and aggressively sensual, *Woyzeck* was predominantly lyrical in a tragic vein. Both, however, displayed that effective mixture of rigorous sophistication and sensuous accessibility which marks all this choreographer's work.

She usually prefers to base her work on a familiar literary text, perhaps to give the viewer the security of a safe anchor and allow him or her to venture more freely with her on her daring aesthetic and emotional explorations of the unspoken realms. In this case the text was German, but she pared it down to its universal core. Nevertheless, she re-

grets that she did not spend enough time on studying Egyptian modes of physical expression before embarking on her workshop. Certain movements we are all born with, she says "and I try to use these as much as possible. The test are culturally determined. After I walked about the streets of Cairo and watched the way people carry their bodies and express themselves I thought that if I ever do a workshop here again, I am going to do it differently. I would also use a text from this culture. It would be very interesting." She rubbed her hands in excitement as she said the last sentence.

About the future of dance theatre in Egypt and, indeed, all over the world, she is extremely optimistic. "Body language is universal," she says emphatically, leaving no room for further arguments. What about body taboos and the human voice? Pure voice, no words, she welcomes and often uses in her theatre; as for taboos, it is the function of dance theatre to overcome them and free the human body. The company she founded in the late eighties, the Tanztheater München, was multinational and her Egyptian students gave her no trouble over taboos. In fact she found them more pliant and malleable than her German trainees.

Before we parted, she commented admiringly on the deep sense of commitment to the work her group showed and when I told her that part of it was due to the fact that most of them had watched and loved her *Huis Clos* back in 1989, she rubbed her hands gleefully flashing at me that wonderful smile of hers.

Eva-Maria Lerchenberg-Thony came to Cairo from her home town, Innsbruck, where she had been director of ballet at the Tiroler Landestheater since 1992. When she left Cairo for her new post as director of the dance department at the Stadtheater Augsburg, she had already made this city of ours her second home town.

Music

Eyes of the sea

David Blake peers through the soft furnishing

The Pearl Fishers, Georges Bizet, production Franco-Egyptian; Mis-en-scene Michel Archimbaud and Alexandre Bois; Cairo Opera Orchestra, Alain Margoni, conductor; Cairo Opera House, Main Hall, 26 March

Pearls high in the sky — a dream of the East. The cast on stage, though, were not a dream. These pearls were packed in sturdy cases ready for export to a pearl-greedy world.

There were pearl shell shapes in the drop curtain which opened every scene, making for an alliterative double identity. Most drop curtains are a nuisance. This one almost exemplified the whole production — a dream with related shapes showing through it in lights and tones.

As the pearl shells rose in the sky and this production began we were in for one of the Cairo Opera's better evenings. The Paris-Cairo team presented a well arranged and carefully worked out show. They went for mood.

Over the years the libretto has suffered a rough passage. Ridiculous, childish — anything down putting will do, but such sides overlook the doughy career of other absurd opera plots — *Ballo in Maschera*, *Il Trouvatore*, Giound, Verdi and Bizet with his pearls have enjoyed a longer life in the opera than others with more literary texts. Strange fate. It's the music which matters.

This arrangement of the

much be eventually learned from Verdi, about whom he professed himself to be very cool.

The cast on the opening night introduced Chantal Bastide of the Paris Opera as the virtuous but wronged Leila and Pierre Catala as Nadir. Their voices blended beautifully in the duets. Mme Bastide is one of those very enjoyable French sopranos. She knows she is there to sing and to be heard. Her line, long and extended or short and sharp, and in this opera often difficult, is always shining and dependable. She is dead centre of the notes, with no timbre of the exterior. Many operas tell a like story and it takes five hours. But this is a brief night at the opera, probably no longer than *Tosca*.

The team of Michel Archimbaud and Alexandre Bois set the work in a sort of dream mix of *Lakme* and the *Magic Flute*. Priests and priestesses move around in ordered profusion with bits of "grand opera" action. But the music saves the situation over and over again, and the brevity of Bizet's ideas keeps it all in shape.

The Pearl Fishers exhibits the same original musical ideas and the same concision of work out as *Carmen*. There is not much time in this score despite the smoothness of the exterior. Many operas tell a like story and it takes five hours. But this is a brief night at the opera, probably no longer than *Tosca*.

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Maybe...no wonder *Carmen* turned out to be a wonder. *Peals* is the work of an operatic "baby" of genius. There are some mechanical turn-ti-turns in the ensemble and some of the joins in the score show how

and give orders. He did both. Raouf Zaidan sang Zurga. And so we come to the actual production. It did not suit him very well. Zurga is naive, instinctive and elemental, qualities that did not come through in the dramatic side of the production. Child-like it may be, but it is not damp — children never are.

This show did not allow Zaidan to play the heavy. Zurga is really the pivot of the tale and it is his heavy aspect that holds it together. Zaidan's voice is not the usual dark resolute Zurga voice. No matter, he sang it with the necessary tone. What was hard on him was that he was never allowed to make the big gesture. In consequence we saw a muted Zurga.

Any dramatic working out of incident was refused — one could almost hear the producer decrying "none of that, it's ham opera". Meetings between Leila and her fisherman Nadir were official and cool. Their touching duet, beautifully sung by both at one of the turning points in the story when they are discovered by Zurga holding hands, was more than limp. They were winding themselves around the bust of the Buddha, the music ravishes — they sang it so — but the production completely lacked dramatic heat.

"Oh Leila", "Oh Nadir". A pity we were not allowed a big baritonal outburst instead of mere observation. But this elegant, carefully set production gave a worthy showing of what treasures can lie inside the shell.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Alfred Stieglitz (Photographs)

Sony Gallery, AUC, Al-Sherif Ribat St, Tel 337 3422. Daily 1pm-5pm, Sun 9am-5pm & 7pm. Until 16 March.

An exhibition of work by the celebrated American photographer who pioneered the use of cameras in the snow and sun.

Lore Bert Al-Swari Arts Centre, 1 Al-Swari St, Zamalek, Tel 381 8211. Collages and installations by German artist.

Yasser Alrawi (Photographs)

Everett Gallery, AUC, Al-Sherif Ribat St, Tel 337 3436. Daily exc Fri, Sun 9am-5pm, Until 16 March.

Photographs of daily scenes in Egypt, Jordan and Sudan.

Al-Nasr PH-Aazz (Sound Alape)

Studio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown, Tel 375 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 5pm & 8pm. Racy, Rox, Roxy, Sq, Helipolis, Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Al-Salam 65 Alab, Hamid Badawi St, Helipolis, Tel 253 1672. Daily 3-3pm, 6-6pm & 9-9pm. MGMC, Karama, Al-Nasr, 22 Talaat St, Dokki, Tel 333 1764. Daily exc Sun, 1pm-5pm. Until 16 March.

Fawaz Wassef (Paintings)

Salem Gallery, 3641 Ahmed Orabi St, Mohamed Ali St, Tel 366 1242. Daily exc Fri, 1pm-2.30pm & 4pm-9pm. Until 14 March.

Saleh Esmail (Paintings)

Al-Hanager, Opera House Grounds, Giza, Tel 337 5481. Daily 10am-1pm, 1pm-1.45pm.

Rostov paintings with more than a hint of nostalgia by one of Egypt's most successful contemporary artists.

Rahib Nasr (Paintings)

Balkan Yacoubi (Sculptures)

Extra Gallery, 3 Al-Naser St, Zamalek, Tel 340 6295. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 1.30pm-2pm & 5pm-6pm. Until 15 March.

Gamil Abdellatif (Sculptures)

Galaxy Gallery, 1 Al-Sherif Ribat St, Downtown, Tel 393 1699. Daily exc Fri, 10am-2pm & 5pm-6pm. Until 19 March.

Saleh Al-Awadi (Paintings)

Al-Azhar Hall, Al-Azhar Building, Al-Azhar St, Tel 376 6100/600. Daily 10am-1pm, 3pm-5pm.

Under the title Kuwait Yesterday And Today, the architectural photographer exhibits photographs highlighting the contrast between the country's past and present.

Sherif El-Nasr

Monica's Art, 23 Encadella St, Downtown, Tel 375 6561. Daily 10am-1pm.

Members of the Cairo Opera

orchestra will perform American and international music for three consecutive days.

Al-Hanager Hall, Al-Qazma (Escape To The Top)

Lido, 23 Encadella St, Downtown, Tel 374 234. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Monday, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown, Tel 324 1654. Daily 10am-1pm.

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Publishers and pirates

Mursi Saad El-Din speaks to Ibrahim El-Moallim, chairman of the Arab Publishers' Union holding its general assembly during the fair

When Ibrahim El-Moallim was elected chairman of the Arab Publishers' Union last year few doubted that he would bring a high profile to the post. As owner of Dar Al-Shorouq, the largest private publishing house in Egypt, established by his father Mohamed El-Moallim, he has consistently worked to maintain the publishing house's enviable reputation for high standards and quality publications. His efforts in this regard were acknowledged when, in 1993, Dar Al-Shorouq won an award for best publisher.

El-Moallim is also chairman of the Egyptian Publishers' Union. Among other credentials for the post, he is chairman of the Committee for the Protection of Intellectual Rights, a member of the Permanent Committee for the Development of Books and Publication Export and a member of the Ministerial Committee for Export Production.

The Arab Publishers' Union was established in 1969 under the auspices of the Arab League. At the time it comprised the Egyptian and Lebanese Publishers' Unions, though its original charter stipulated that publishing unions from other Arab countries would be admitted as and when they were formed. Unfortunately, throughout the 1970s, the Union's activities were so low key as to be practically invisible. It sank into obscurity until the following decade when it reemerged as an important forum for the regional book trade.

Asked about the demarcation line between the tasks of the Egyptian Publishers' Union and those of the Arab Publishers' Union, as well as the cooperation between the two bodies, El-Moallim responds with a jibe: "Of course there is very close cooperation. The proof is the fact that I am chairman of both."

In a more serious vein, El-Moallim emphasises that the prime problem against which the Egyptian Publishers' Union pits itself is the exorbitant level of customs levied on publishers, a problem publishers from other Arab countries also face.

"It is a fact that Egypt is the cultural centre of the Arab world and it is responsible for a large percentage of Arabic books published annually. Books are potentially among the most exportable of Egyptian commodities," he explains, "but look at the problems we face: high customs duties on paper, ink, spare parts for printing machines... etc."

El-Moallim believes that directly approaching governments is the most efficient way of tackling the problem.

"This is a step which can be coordinated between the Arab Publishers' Union and local unions," he says.

Too optimistic perhaps?

El-Moallim does not think so. He argues that if governments reduce to the minimum taxes and customs duties on imported materials this would allow the industry to expand. Demand for such imports would then increase, and in the end the real level of government revenue is likely to rise. In addition an expanded industry will make more profits, which are themselves taxable. "The government," El-Moallim says, "will make far more money this way than they do by nipping the industry in the bud."

In his capacity as chairman of the Egyptian Publishers' Union El-Moallim feels that another very important area to be addressed is the duplication of work done by publishers due to lack of coordination. The Union, he proposes, should act as a coordinating body, keeping track of what publishers are doing and ensuring that there is no duplication and consequent waste of capital and time. He would also like to create an award in the name of the Union for the best book of the year, though it has not yet been decided what kind of books will be eligible for competition.

Another limitation on the role played by Egyptian publishers, in El-Moallim's opinion, is the monopoly in the production of text books maintained by the Ministry of Education.

"In most other countries of the world the ministries of education

set a syllabus and then chooses from textbooks that best meet the needs of that syllabus. Publishers vie to produce the most appropriate texts economically. If such competition were to be introduced into our own system, costs would be reduced and quality improved. As it is, textbooks are written by teachers and inspectors with no experience in publishing and the end results tend to be unappealing."

There are some staple constituents of the Arab Publishers' Union role that El-Moallim would like to expand: "strengthening cooperation among Arab publishers and distributors, laying down traditions for the trade, holding training seminars for publishers... among others." But topping El-Moallim's agenda, indeed the yardstick of his tenure as chairman, is the chronic problem of book piracy in the Arab world. "The problems engendered by piracy and breach of copyright are grave. It is enormously harmful to publishers who invest huge sums, invaluable time and expertise in producing books and then find the revenue going elsewhere. This either results in publishers giving up altogether or in curtailing their activities, contracting operations rather than expanding."

Given this position El-Moallim's dual-role as chairman of the two unions must come in useful, since it is mostly Egyptian books that are pirated in other parts of the Arab world.

"In addition to the ethical questions involved," El-Moallim continues, "we at the Egyptian Publishers' Union are aware that book export is very important for Egypt. Our most important export commodity is culture, for which there is a rising demand. Furthermore, the export of Egyptian culture abroad encourages the export of other Egyptian products as it creates a sympathy towards the country and boosts tourism."

What measures, then, can be taken through the Arab Publishers' Union to counter the problem?

"The most important step is to raise awareness that piracy is a crime and a heinous crime at that. There are also the legal problems that ensue from differences in legislation between Arab countries. If you steal a radio or cup, you are imprisoned, whereas if you pirate a book you are made to pay a fine and told that the next time you will be imprisoned — this despite the fact that such copyright infringements cost both publishers and writers large portions of potential revenues and regardless of the fact that these are premeditated crimes, perpetrated by organised mafias."

One of the ways by which El-Moallim hopes, through the Arab Publishers' Union, to improve the situation is "to press for more consistent legislation across the Arab world that would involve the imposition of financial penalties at levels similar to the costs of the crime, and which would not exclude imprisonment for first time offenders."

Is it, though, too optimistic to expect such legislation in the near future? El-Moallim does not seem to think so.

"We are going to try and have such legislation passed through the Arab League," he comments. "But," he says, "until such legislation is passed, we shall continue to do our best to ensure that the penalties already in place are strictly applied in all cases of copyright infringement. During this year's fair we will hold a general assembly meeting with the participation of 250 publishers representing 14 Arab states. Participants will be urged to become signatories to a voluntary copyright regulatory body, and will request their help in drawing our attention to any malpractices."

In the past nine months, he adds with an unmistakable note of glee, the Arab Publishers' Union have uncovered three large pirate operations.



Will they, won't they?

The Cairo International Book Fair has developed over the years into the largest event of its kind, at least in terms of the numbers of visitors. And unlike other international book fairs, the event does not restrict itself to exhibitors and their trade customers but throws open its gates to welcome the general public.

But has the general public been confused by the repeated rescheduling of this year's event? Its traditional slot in the January mid-term break meant that the fair attracted not only students and families with children but also people visiting Cairo from the provinces, often with the specific purpose of attending the fair. Rescheduling the event to the final week of February meant that it coincided with the end of the *Eid*, when many people's budgets are already overstretched. Given the fair grounds' own booking schedule, it also meant that the fair, which normally runs for two weeks, would continue this year for just ten days.

Weekday crowds certainly appear to be much thinner than at earlier fairs, and for the first time in several years it was possible to enter the grounds without joining long queues. So has this year been good for business?

According to Rafiq Hezzi of Manshaat Al-Maaref, the Alexandrian publishing house and bookseller, sales this year have barely reached half of last year's figures. There has been, he observes, a noticeable drop in Arab participation, among publishers and general visitors. There were, however, some compensations. He thought the organisation on the ground was better than previous years. The exhibition hall containing his stand had been repainted, and the stalls themselves were more sturdy constructed.

Outside the main exhibition halls business appeared to be going on as usual. One of the most popular features of the Book Fair has been the annual reappearance of the second hand book stalls that were once part of Ezbekiya Gardens. Several years ago they were moved from Opera Square to a less accessible venue behind Al-Hussein Hospital in Darrasah. The book fair, for these traders, presents an opportunity to make up for the trade they lost following the move.

Despite a healthy crowd fingering his books, Saber Abu, a regular stall holder in the so-called Sour Al-Ezbekiya, expressed distress at the postponement. "I would call on the authorities to stick to the date of the fair, which is an international event. The postponement confused people, not only traders but also customers. There is no doubt that there are far fewer customers this year," he said. "But the rent for a kiosk in Sour Al-Ezbekiya is LE1,250, slightly more than last year though we shall make less money because of the shorter period."

If attendance figures were down, then who was missing?

Amm Mohamed has sold popcorn at all 28 Cairo Book Fairs, moving with the event from the Gezira Exhibition Grounds to its present site. This year, he says, there are fewer people carrying fewer bags on their way out of the halls. "Customers seem older," he says. "There are fewer youngsters and hardly any students."

Perhaps Mona Moustah and her husband Magdi Rifaaat would be counted by Amm Mohamed as among the non-students. She teaches French as a second language, her husband is a medical doctor. Like Amm Mohamed they have not missed a single fair. "There are fewer people this year," said Mona Moustah, "though frankly that's fine by me. At least I can see the books properly and there is room to browse." The couple, in the process of investing heavily in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, had already filled two carrier bags with other titles.

One member of that endangered book fair species, Ahmed Ali Sayed, a student from Assuit University, was encountered at the stand of Al-Shaab. "The timing this year is very inconvenient, coming after the mid-year holiday," he complained. "But from the organisational point of view things seem better this year."

Books, of course, are the *raison d'être* of the event. But they are not its only attraction. The seminar programmes also have their devotees, though they are not everybody's cup of tea. Ahmed Bahaa, an engineer, cannot quite see the point of holding seminars and poetry readings. "People come to buy books and don't need distractions like that," he insists.

Others are of a different persuasion. Youssri El-Azab, participant in the Cultural Café seminar on banned heritage books, saw things in a different light. "Despite the confusion caused by the rescheduling, the seminars, poetry readings and other cultural activities have attracted a wide audience; evidence," he claims, "of the interest in dialogue and discussion of matters of cultural significance."

But if improvements have been noted in the organisation of the fair's more commercial activities, this does not apply to the cultural programmes. The first night of seminars was to conclude with a reading by the celebrated Iraqi poet Abdel-Wahab Al-Bayati. The advertised guest of honour, though, was not present. Instead the audience found Hassan Abdallah Al-Qurashi, a Saudi poet.

The pattern was repeated on the second night when Ahmed Abdel-Moeti Hegazi was advertised as reader. He was not present. The guest of honour at the reading was announced as the Sudanese poet Mohamed Al-Faitouri. Al-Faitouri did not turn up. That he did not, came as no surprise to those who were as fast with the announcement made by the organiser, at the end of the previous evening. Then it was said that the Palestinian poet Mourid Bargouthi would be replacing Al-Faitouri. The Sunday morning papers, however, continued to announce that Al-Faitouri would be present. As it was, neither showed, following the lead of Hegazi. Al-Faitouri's name appeared again in Monday morning's press advertisements. Did he or didn't he?

Spell for success

Tahia Abdel-Nasser examines the hopes and worries of some of the English language publishers participating at this year's book fair

The Cairo 28th International Book Fair, in addition to presenting English language publishing houses with the opportunity to exhibit current titles alongside their backlists for sale to the general public also affords trade opportunities, as publishers, distributors and book sellers meet together in an arena dedicated to promoting their products and services. And among Egyptian publishers, those specialising in English language texts are as eager as any to capitalise on the opportunities afforded by the event.

Among Cairo based English language publishers participating in the Cairo 28th International Book Fair are the American University in Cairo Press, operating since 1960 and now with 150 titles in print, and Elias Modern Publishing House, founded in 1933 as the Modern Press. Such local operations are, naturally enough, given the international aspect of the festival, supplemented by overseas English language publishers such as Oxford University Press (OUP).

AUC Press will use the event to publicise 27 new titles which will be displayed alongside a backlist consisting of scholarly texts, reference works, guide books and Arabic literature in English translation. According to Mark Linz, the director of AUC Press, co-publishing and distribution arrangements with British and American book companies mean that the AUC booth in Italia Hall will also be representing titles from Columbia University Press, University of California Press, International Thomson Publishing, Princeton University Press and W. W. Norton & Co.

Mark Linz, keen to play up the book fair's international credentials and implications for the regional publishing trade stressed the importance of participants outside Egypt, who exhibit alongside local publishers. Such implications, indeed, will form the focus of a seminar, *Book Marketing Opportunities in the New Middle East*, jointly sponsored by the General Egyptian Book Organisation and AUC Press and aimed primarily at foreign publishers visiting the Cairo International Book Fair.

"Cairo's international book fair is the largest in the world in terms of the numbers of visitors," remarked Mark Linz. "It could and should develop into the region's publishing powerhouse. But it needs a more reliable organisation and must concentrate its efforts to attract foreign publishers."

The problems that have arisen from the postponement of this year's Cairo International Book Fair, initially scheduled to take place between 7-18 January, were touched upon by the managing editor of Elias Modern Publishing House. According to Laura Kfoury, short notice rescheduling leads to a lot of wasted effort on the part of participants who try hard to meet the organisers' deadlines only to find that their own timetables are suddenly out of sync with the event. Orders are placed, books delivered, airline tickets booked, bags packed as Mark Linz points out, only to find that the dates have been altered. Rescheduling, too, is likely to lower attendance at the event on the part of the general public.

This is likely to present real problems for OUP, the bulk of whose business in Egypt is in educational texts, according to Ruth West, the publisher's representative in Egypt. The Cairo Book Fair, abandoning its usual slot which coincides with the January school holidays, has been "wrongly-timed" she says.

"I feel numbers will be down this year. Only Fridays and Saturdays are likely to be crowded but weekdays will be generally quiet," predicted West last week. The late decision to move the Cairo event closer to the London International Book Fair, scheduled for 17-20 March, is likely to have lowered the

number of overseas publishers participating, claims West. Apart from focusing on the Cairo International Book Fair as a book-launching venue and a market for generating feedback that may influence the selection of future titles, Mark Linz is keen to utilise the event to reinforce the profile of his institution's educational mission. AUC Press is, he says, expanding its contribution to educational programmes this year by introducing and selecting English language textbooks for English divisions in the faculties of commerce of Egyptian universities, and to coincide with the timing of the book fair, AUC has scheduled a panel discussion which will include the dean of Al-Azhar's Faculty of Commerce.

Just as embedded in the educational domain, through its dictionaries, literary translations, bilingual anthologies and children's books, is Elias Modern Publishing House. Recent book releases include the English-Arabic bilingual *Elias Business Dictionary*, containing terms widely used in the commercial world and citing examples that demonstrate the usage of terms and phrases in context, an English-Arabic bilingual revised second edition of Salah Jahine's *Ruba eyat*, an Arabic-from-French translation of selected Cavafy poems and a new series of children's books comprising works merging the contemporary and Pharaonic worlds.

Both Sawsan Mardini and Laura Kfoury of Elias were careful to draw attention to their new series of children's books intended, they stressed, to lend an Egyptian perspective to a field dominated by overseas publishers — namely the high quality, full colour illustrated children's book. Kfoury characterised the products of local companies catering for the market as being of a generally low standard — unattractive publications with far from high standards. Elias, she stated, hopes to fill this gap by producing quality illustrated texts at a lower price than the exorbitant sums charged for imported books.

Bilingual anthologies, such as English translations of Emily Nasrallah's *Fantastic Strokes of the Imagination*, Mohamed El-Makhzangi's *In the Cold Night*, No'man Ashour's *Give us our Money Back* (Simsi Awanta) and Tewfik El-Hakim's *The People of the Cave* (Ahi Al-Kahf) or Arabic translations of Doris Lessing and Cavafy, are intended to assist, their publishers hope, in "improving the knowledge of a language in a literary sense".

So what will leading English language publishers be hawking most heavily at this year's book fair?

Mark Linz, of AUC Press, has high hopes for a lavishly-illustrated volume *Animal World of the Pharaohs*, an abridged *Description de l'Egypte* that still manages to fill over 1,000 pages, the first translation into English of Qasim Amin's *The New Woman*, Khaled Mohamed's *Memories of a Revolution* and a tracing of the evolution of Egyptian bureaucracy from the Ottoman reign to the present, *The State and its Servants*. In addition, foreign publications from 15 American publishers distributed by AUC Press at the book fair will range from texts on business, economics, history and women's studies to literary anthologies and analyses in comparative literature.

"Though English language books form a relatively small slice of the fair, lagging far behind Arabic language books, the number of English publications is increasing," comments Mark Linz. It is an upswing on which many English language publishers will be pinning their hopes.

OUP, though it will be offering English language teaching text books at the fair, expect as usual, that their dictionaries will prove most popular with individual purchasers.

Spelling, it seems, continues to cast its spell.

لهم انت لـ ٥٦

won't they?



Avid readers flock to the Ezbekiya stalls where they rummage through stacked books in search of bargains ranging from foreign classics, to first editions and old magazines

28th Cairo International Book Fair: seminar programme

Programme of main seminars:

Venue: Saraya Al-Istishmar

Thur, 29 Feb

Author and work seminar

Al-Sira Al-Gamila fi Wal-Siyasi Fi Apr Mubarak (The Social and Political Struggle in Mubarak's Era)

Author: Abdel-Aziz Ramadan

discusses his book with Ragab El-Banna, Fawzi Fahmy and Gamal Badawi

1-3pm

Theme: "Where do we stand vis-à-vis the international and Arab experiences"

Participants: Mohamed Abdela, Mohamed Nur Farhat, Sabahdin Hafez, Hussein Abdel-Razzak, Kamel Abu-Magd and Hanan Ashrawi

3-5pm

Theme: "Where do we stand vis-à-vis the new century's culture"

Participants: Samih Al-Qassem, Lutfi El-Kholi, Kamel Zubeir, Gamal El-Ghamari and Gaber Asfour

5-7pm

Open forum with Minister of Local Government Mahmoud El-Shenif

7-8pm

Testimonies and experiences: address by Atef Ebaid

8pm

Poetry reading

Participants: Mohamed Ibrahim, Abu Senna, Amrin Fouad, Zem El-Abedin Fouad, Gamal Abdel-Rahman, Abdel-Moneim Awad, Heini Salem, Wafa Wagdi

9pm

Author and work seminar

Al-Masrifiya (The Plays)

Author: Mahmoud El-Sa'idi discusses his book with Abdell-Qader El-Qut, Saad Ardash and Nahed Schleha

1-3pm

Theme: "Where do we stand vis-à-vis the technological revolution"

Participants: Ossama El-Kholi, Ahmed Mostaguir and Fawzi Hamoud

3-5pm

Theme: "Where do we stand vis-à-vis the next century's culture"

Participants: Mahmoud Amin, El-Alem, Alfred Farag, El-Sayed Yassir, Fouad Zakaria, Fawzi Fahmy, Salab Fadi, Shukri El-Esnai and Gaber Asfour

5-7pm

Open forum with Minister of Interior Hassan El-Aifi

7-8pm

Open forum with Mustafa El-Fiqi

7-8pm

Testimonies and experiences: address by Rida Shehata

8pm

Poetry reading

Guests of honour: B. Al-Haydar (Iraq) and Ahmed Labib (Palestine)

Participants: Sayed Hegab, Rifat Salam, Mohamed Bahgat, Abdell-Moneim Ramadan, Mohamed El-Shetaway and Youssri Khairi

9pm

Author and work seminar

Le-har Al-Sata fi Misr (The game of power in Egypt)

Author: Ahmad Hammouda discusses his book with Salaheddin Hafez, Gamal Badawi, Abdell-Al-Baqour and Mahmoud El-Maraghi

1-3pm

Theme: "Where do we stand vis-à-vis the revolution of economic blocs"

Participants: Nawa El-Taiawi, Mohamed Sid-Ahmed, Ismail Sabri Abdalla, Abdell-Hegazi, Tarek Heggy, Mohamed Genidli and Gamal Mubarak

3-5pm

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City of hope?

Homeless children make up one per cent of the Egyptian population. Nermene El-Nawawi visits an institution which provides an alternative to life on the streets.



A hot meal, a basic education and the chance of learning a craft is provided by the centres, but they cannot always make up for the lack of a real family

Hope Village seeks to approximate family-type care and shelter for street children — homeless, abused or neglected children, who spend most of their time on the streets — in order to counteract the social maladjustment from which they suffer. The Village attempts to provide young delinquents with educational, psychological and health care services aimed at shaping them into "good citizens".

Children at the Village are often orphans or children of unknown parentage. Most have been, or still are, abused or neglected. Most children at the Village have, or are recovering from, wounds or illnesses. "The father of one of the boys put a cigarette in his eye," says Hoda Gad, the Village's former general manager. The children have no confidence in adults and are apt to be aggressive. The survival strategies they have had to develop in the face of hostility from their environment are socially unacceptable, and push them even further into the margin: petty theft, lying, and violent behaviour. The social workers are responsible for re-educating the children and creating a bond with society to replace the atmosphere of violence in which the children have been bred. "It took one of the social workers a lot of work and perseverance to bring back the confidence of one of the boys found eating garbage from a dumpsite," Gad remembers.

"Nearly all associations provide for children until they are 12, but Hope Village extends its services until children are able to provide for themselves or go back to their families," says Sayed Mounir, chairman of the board of Hope Village.

Despite the fact that both girls and boys live on the street, all the children who currently visit the centre are boys. "We decided to start by dealing with boys because 90 percent of the approximately 60,000 street children in Egypt are boys," says Gad. According to Mounir, it would have been impossible to provide services for both boys and girls from the start. Due to the lack of any previous experience, the Village's programme was elaborated on a trial-and-error basis and it was necessary to impose some sort of limitations on the group targeted to receive services. "As we cannot solve the whole problem of street children in Egypt, we aim to establish ourselves as a model for other associations to follow," says Mounir.

Richard Hemsley, a British citizen then providing for a number of abandoned children, together with 11 members now constituting the board of trustees, established Hope Village in 1988. At the time, the Village had only one centre, attended by seven children. "We recruited the first children mainly through cooperation with the police forces and newspaper articles about children with no families," Mounir says. Activities have now expanded and the Village comprises six centres: three of them permanent, in Nasr City and Al-Mugattam, and three transitional in Shubra, Sayeda Zeinab and Hadayeq Al-Qubba.

The Shubra reception centre, street children's first encounter with Hope Village, serves more than 1,500 children per year. Shubra social workers study the conditions of street children and recruit them to "the club", as the centre is called. Some children come in every day of their own accord; others need a little encouragement, and the social workers often walk around the streets of Shubra, perhaps making sure that the children are not in trouble, and that they know a meal will be waiting for them at the club. In Shubra, the children take basic classes in literature and religion; recreation facilities of a sort are available, as are health and hygiene services. Two hot

meals are served each day. The Shubra centre takes in two kinds of children: permanent visitors, who come in each morning and leave in the afternoon, and occasional visitors, who come in on an irregular basis.

The Shubra social workers aim to return all the permanent visitors to their families whenever possible, pointing out the adverse effects of life on the street to the boys and their parents, enrolling the children in schools or finding suitable jobs for them. On the other hand, it is rare that occasional visitors adapt to life at the centre; most often, they find themselves back on the street.

In addition to being a reception centre, the Sayeda Zeinab centre, to be formally inaugurated on 10 March, has an emergency section for wounded or ill children. The centre is expected to serve almost 2,000 children a year.

So what good are the reception centres' services if the children are out on the streets again in the afternoon? Mounir claims that dealing with street children gradually is the best way to attract their interest. "Some of these children admire life on the street, where there are no restrictions or rules," he says.

The third centre, in Hadayeq, is a short-term shelter where children may

stay for a period ranging between one and six months. During this period, social workers try to find the children's families if they are lost, or solve any problems between the boys and their families. Children are offered a more elaborate educational programme and are trained in rug making, brass and glass work, and ornamental crafts.

The first of the two Nasr City centres has 16 permanent residents ranging from 6 to 12 years of age, all of whom are enrolled in primary government schools. "Social workers try to create a parental environment by escorting the children to school, studying with them in the afternoon, and putting them to bed in the evening," says Mounir. Most of the residents of the second permanent Nasr City centre, ranging from 12 to 18 years of age, are in preparatory and secondary public schools.

The Mugattam centre was inaugurated in April 1995. Offering a whole line of community and social services, the centre provides more than 65 children from the area with an educated, health services, clothes, and two meals a day. The centre has a special "independent home" for six youngsters above 14, all working permanent jobs with reasonable pay. The teenagers contribute LE 10

to the centre every month and help the social workers clean the house, make their beds, and wash their clothes. "Because he did not want to share in these responsibilities, one of these boys can stay away from the centre, but returned 10 days later," Gad says.

From the perspective of the Hope Village social workers, the lack of national awareness regarding the problems of street children is a major problem. Another is parents' misconception, and sometimes abuse, of services offered by the centres. Lack of sufficient or effective experience and training in the field constitutes the third problem. The fourth is funding. Hope Village's sources of funding differ

from one year to the next. The estimated budget for 1996 is LE \$30,000. Sixty percent of funds come from national and local donors such as members of the Board, major firms or the areas where the centres are established.

"Although it is quite difficult to reach donors, they sometimes provide the village with ready-made items from the start of new academic year books and uniforms, for instance," says Gad.

The remaining 40 percent comes from regional and international organisations like the Arab Council for Children and Development, or international organisations like the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Labour Organisation and Oxfam.

In addition to providing Hope Village with a yearly budget ranging from LE \$30,000 to 50,000, the Arab Council for Children and Development provides the Village with expertise and consultancy, according to Dina Sobhi, a research assistant on the Council's Projects and Programmes Sector. The Council also funded most of the basic requirements of the new Sayeda Zeinab centre. "We conducted a survey of all similar institutions in the Arab world and found Hope Village to be one of the best," Sobhi says. Upon receiving the Village's estimated yearly budget, the Council decides which aspects it will support and concludes an agreement with the Village. "The Village's efforts have been very successful till now," she says.

Hania Moussa, Project Coordinator for Hope Village at UNICEF, explains UNICEF's current funding of the Shubra centre and the centre's direct contact with street children, its sustainability and the possibility of its replication elsewhere. UNICEF supervises the health services available at the centre by providing children with a doctor, upgrading medical equipment, and implementing a healthy nutrition

programme. "One of our lawyers raises the awareness of the staff and children concerning the legal rights of street children," says Moussa. Refusing to disclose the amount UNICEF contributes to the Village, she notes: "We give them the minimum we can provide on a three-month term." The Village provides UNICEF with progress and financial reports every month on the basis of which the three-month budget is decided.

Current funds do not allow the village to open up new centres serving families and local communities. "We are trying to generate permanent sources of funding by selling postcards and items the children have made in shops and embassies," says Mounir. The Village is calling for more funds to establish an income-generating project, namely several workshops, a residential area and a farm, on a 4.5-acre plot in Tenth of Ramadan City, provided by the Ministry of Social Affairs, according to Mounir. Such a project would help create employment opportunities for children of the Village and other recent graduates.

International organisations like UNICEF associate the problems of homeless children with phenomena such as child labour. According to Fatma Khafaga, UNICEF Programme Officer for Women, the most recent estimates published by the Ministry of Labour show that there are two million working children in Egypt. International trends point to an insistence that children enjoy certain rights; yet policy makers have made no effort to really cope with the problems of working children. In recent rounds of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), importers of goods from developing countries have pushed for the adoption of a seal guaranteeing that child labour was not involved in production. "In Egypt, it is not a problem concerning only the Ministry of Labour, but of how the mode of production permits the child to work and generate money instead of being in school," Khafaga says.

The remaining 40 percent comes from regional and international organisations like the Arab Council for Children and Development, or international organisations like the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Labour Organisation and Oxfam.

"Children's work and training during and after the academic year also helps them depend on themselves to face life afterwards," Mounir says.

The Village is currently undertaking a multi-faceted research project on deprived children or those generally in difficult circumstances in Egypt. "We will try to tackle the reasons for such problems and the best alternatives to overcome it," adds Mounir.

Hope Village may not be street children's ticket to success. Many of them are trained to become manual laborers and have little hope, without sufficient education, of making it out of the underclass. But with food, and a place to stay, they may well be the lucky ones.

Follow the leaders

On this first, crisp *Eid* morning I decided to take the Metro to work. The station was full of young children in colourful outfits, excitedly discussing the outing of the day and showing off their new clothes. Quite a change from the usual sullen young faces and grey uniforms! The women's compartment was empty, allowing me to see my favorite observation post near the door.

At the next stop a small group of young boys got on. The oldest was no more than 12 years old; the others, around 10, were clearly on their first outing alone. They were all wearing something new, mainly shoes, the sports kind, chunky with platform soles and worn with the laces undone in what seems to be the latest fashion. The shoes were definitely not comfortable and looked at least two sizes too big, but the boys seemed quite careful not to soil them. One little boy appeared to be their leader. They all referred to him. He had a nice smile with dimples and the attitude of a grown-up. As soon as they got on he counted them and told them to sit down. He was holding the hand of the youngest one, who had trouble finding his balance. The young leader counted the stations on his fingers. "It's the third one after this one," he announced. They all counted three on their fingers.

"Keep all your money safely in your pockets," he told the group. "And beware of thieves, they can take the money right out of your pocket without you feeling a thing; just give me 50 piastres each for the tickets." The boys were reluctant to part with their piastres. "We do not have change," they explained. "As soon as we change our pounds we will give you 50 piastres, honestly we will." It was obvious that their trust had limits, reached when their money appeared to be in jeopardy.

Meanwhile, the taller boy of the group, Hazem, was whispering with another boy who was nodding in agreement. Hazem, I thought to myself, had a sweetie's face and shiny eyes. He was also the leader of the group, and somehow I imagined that he was showing hostility to the young leader. Slowly the focus of interest was changing, the other boys crowding around Hazem. There was an obvious shift in leadership. Hazem was rapidly taking control. The soon-to-be-ex-leader observed the scene for a minute, then shrugged and turned his attention towards the window. His whole attitude seemed to say he would have no part in what was going on. Every now and then he would steal a glance at them, then shake his head and resume his contemplation of the scenery. The discussion in the boys' corner was getting more and more animated; Hazem wanted to know how much money each boy had. The amounts ranged between LE 2 and LE 5. Hazem explained that this was not fair. The money should be divided equally. At first the boys refused, arguing that their parents gave them the money so that they could enjoy themselves, not share it with the others. Having exhausted his arguments, Hazem tried another method to put his point across: A crisp-five-pound-note emerged from his pocket; he placed it in his outstretched hand. Here, he said he had the most money and was willing to share it. The boys were silenced. One by one, they searched their pockets. The process took some time. Finally one boy extracted a pound from his pocket, looked at it and placed it on Hazem's five-pound note. "You have more," said Hazem coldly. A second note travelled the same way. "That's all I have," said the boy, his face red from the effort of parting with his money. The others followed suit. "Hang on," urged Hazem, "we're almost there."

Only the young leader had not come forward. He was still looking out of the window, fidgety, indifferent. "Well, Hani, where is your money?" asked Hazem. Hani turned around slowly. "I'm not giving you my money," he said distinctly. Hazem found a few strong adjectives to qualify Hani's refusal. He does not want to share, he is not a real friend, he is like a dog, he wants everything for himself. Hazem told the others; he does not deserve our friendship. The boys were indignant. One of them punched Hani in the stomach, then kicked him. That was the signal for the others to start pushing and shoving him. Hani defended himself as best he could, but hung on to his money even when he was finally thrown to the floor. The boys' station had come and gone, but they were too busy fighting to notice. When they finally picked themselves up, discouraged by Hani's resistance, they checked the damage to their clothes, dusting themselves and each other off, then turned to Hazem for help. He would be able to take Hani's money. But Hazem was nowhere to be seen. He alone had got off at the right stop — with everybody's money. The look of dismay on the boys' faces moved Hani, who had been licking his wounds. When Hazem's betrayal became obvious, he consoled the younger boys. They could not believe that they would never see their money again, that the day was spoilt. Each boy seemed to be reviewing the evidence for himself, then coming to the same conclusion as the others. The train was entering the station. "Come on, boys," said Hani, extracting a few crumpled bills from his torn pocket. "I have enough money to take us all home."

Fayza Hassan

Safa Dayna

"Bukhari" rice

Ingredients:

1/2 kilo beef (diced)
2 cups rice
1/4 kilo of each:
Onions (diced), carrots (grated)
Dry raisins, almonds (skinned), tomatoes (skinned and diced), one cup fresh tomato juice (strained from its seeds)
Butter

Salt, pepper, allspice
A pinch of grated nutmeg
A cube of beef stock

Method:

Fry the onion in butter until golden, then add the meat. When it turns golden, add the carrots and the diced tomatoes. Stir them in then add the raisins and season. Add some boiling water, cover and simmer over medium heat for 45 minutes. Uncover, add the cube stock and the rice, then stir all ingredients well. Water should be enough to cook the rice. When it boils, lower the heat and place the pan over a simmering ring and leave covered to cook for another 45 minutes. Fry golden the almonds and stir in the rice half the quantity 5 minutes before removing from heat. The other half of the almonds are to be placed on top of the "Bukhari" rice upon serving.

Serve with a rich green salad and a vegetable soup.
Noufira Abdel Malek

Restaurant review

Beyond the cherry doors

Nigel Ryan on fast, functional food

Abu Shakra is something of an institution. And as befits an institution it has rather grand doors — enormous things in cherry stained wood that require less skill than brute force to open. Once they swing on their hinges, though, and you pass through, the restaurant, on the other side is a far less intimidating place than you might suppose. If the doors are outside, the interior is remarkably pint sized. And it seems even smaller, because the dining room has been split into two, and is always busy.

We sat in the smaller of the two restaurants, which contained just four tables. Recently the place has undergone a renovation — the exterior is now clad with polished granite, the aforementioned doors have been added, and the interior of the smaller dining room has been painted a lurid salmon pink. The wainscot is green. The colour combinations are disconcerting, though a little pastoral relief is provided by two large landscape prints in hefty wooden frames. The whole effect is faintly cartoonish, entering a little like falling through a looking glass.

Now the menu at Abu Shakra is a traditional affair. This is, after all, a place that has built its reputation on *kofta* and *kebab*. It contains everything you might expect from an 'oriental' restaurant. And judging from the restaurant's popularity there is little reason to expect that anything served would be less than wholesome. And so it was.

Within minutes a basket of *baladi* loaves had been placed on the table. Now you know that you like the bread, but all too often you forget why, since so many restaurants have taken to serving stale little fribsches that if thrown could well result in decapitation. This is not the case at Abu Shakra where the bread is invariably as fresh as can be, and perfectly delicious. So too

the salads, which arrived as an accompaniment.

Al-Ahram Weekly Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

ACROSS

1. Sacred bull of Ancient Egyptians (4)
2. Scorch (4)
3. Advantage; possession (5)
4. Aching (4)
5. Rattling sound in lungs (4)
6. Gawk (5)
7. Equal (4)
8. In the fore (5)
9. Arm bone (4)
10. Ducts (4)
11. Fescue (7)
12. Rustic (5)
13. Sketch, draft (7)
14. Modern (3)
15. ~~AL-KOFA~~ ~~ABABA~~ ~~GOST~~ ~~LORIE~~ ~~EMOTIC~~ ~~HOME~~ ~~TAIDAN~~ ~~TAROT~~ ~~ZIGAR~~ ~~DELUCH~~ ~~AL PICTHEQ~~ ~~ELAIE~~ ~~NEBB~~ ~~GLORY~~ ~~NOW STORE~~ ~~KIRE~~ ~~ASSIST~~ ~~BED~~ ~~MAMID~~ ~~BUILT~~ ~~SERE~~ ~~SEE~~ ~~SURELY~~ ~~ELIAN~~ ~~PYTHON~~ ~~ERIE~~ ~~PAINS~~ ~~SEE~~ ~~CHOW~~ ~~AGGEBET~~ ~~BITT~~ ~~CHUTIS~~ ~~VALIE~~ ~~GLOBAL~~ ~~TOPIC~~ ~~LIST~~ ~~STICK~~ ~~CLAIM~~ ~~BEVEN~~ ~~DAPIS~~ ~~TELLIS~~ ~~REBD~~
16. Laughing expression (4)
17. Beer (3)
18. Gleamed (6)
19. Similar to (2)
20. Dwarfed (7)
21. Snash mts (5)
22. Fury (3)
23. Put hands of clock to right time (4)
24. Hard swelling on gouty joint (4)
25. Small viper (3)
26. Edgar Allan... (3)
27. Fury (3)
28. File (5)
29. Free (3)
30. Experiment with (4)
31. Comfort (4)
32. Cry down (3)
33. Church officials (6)
34. Likely (3)
35. Sketch, draft (7)
36. Modern (3)
37. ~~AL-KOFA~~ ~~ABABA~~ ~~GOST~~ ~~LORIE~~ ~~EMOTIC~~ ~~HOME~~ ~~TAIDAN~~ ~~TAROT~~ ~~ZIGAR~~ ~~DELUCH~~ ~~AL PICTHEQ~~ ~~ELAIE~~ ~~NEBB~~ ~~GLORY~~ ~~NOW STORE~~ ~~KIRE~~ ~~ASSIST~~ ~~BED~~ ~~MAMID~~ ~~BUILT~~ ~~SERE~~ ~~SEE~~ ~~SURELY~~ ~~ELIAN~~ ~~PYTHON~~ ~~ERIE~~ ~~PAINS~~ ~~SEE~~ ~~CHOW~~ ~~AGGEBET~~ ~~BITT~~ ~~CHUTIS~~ ~~VALIE~~ ~~GLOBAL~~ ~~TOPIC~~ ~~LIST~~ ~~STICK~~ ~~CLAIM~~ ~~BEVEN~~ ~~DAPIS~~ ~~TELLIS~~ ~~REBD~~
38. Sketch, draft (7)
39. First lady (3)
40. South American capital (4)
41. Therefore (4)
42. Indefinite amount (3)
43. Reception room in continental houses (5)
44. Incompetent (5)
45. Collier (5)
46. Train of attendants (7)
47. Opening in clouds (4)
48. Operatic solo (4)
49. Chrysanthemum = white... marigold = yellow.... 2 wds (5)
50. Cupid (4)
51. Adhesive (5)
52. Small isle in river (4)
53. Mount (4)
54. Ridgepole, smirk (5)
55. Put hands of clock to right time (4)
56. Hard swelling on gouty joint (4)
57. Put hands of clock to right time (4)
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EGYPTIAN CARICATURES: In the '40s, '50s and '60s, Rakha's *Bint El-Balad*, El-Masri Effendi and El-Sabba' Effendi (left); in the '80s and '90s, Mustafa Hussein's Kamboura, Abdel-Routine, El-Koheit and the Kafir El-Hanadwa peasant

Mock politics

Politics and cartoons have often made a provocative duo. When the International Museum of Cartoon Art opens next week in Florida, local artists will receive international recognition, writes Thomas Gorguissian

Sixty-four years ago, on 7 March 1932, the Egyptian cartoon character El-Masri Effendi (The Egyptian Effendi) was born. Its birthplace was *Rose El-Youssef* magazine and the cartoonist was Saroukhan. Nine years later, *Ibn El-Balad* (Native Son) was born on the pages of *El-Etma'a* magazine. This time the cartoonist was Rakha.

Both these characters played obvious roles in Egyptian politics for decades by successfully expressing to those in power the people's wishes and criticisms, either directly or indirectly. Both, as personified, were wise and intelligent enough to know what the people would want to say, and that the authorities would have to listen. El-Masri Effendi appeared wearing a *pakka* and a *turbouche*, and holding a *sebha* (prayer beads) in his hand, while his El-Balad wore a *galabiyah*, with a sturdy staff in hand.

Three cartoonists — Saroukhan (an Armenian), Juan Santes (a Spaniard), and Refiki (a Turk) — are considered the pioneers of the Egyptian political cartoon, beginning their work for the most part in the 1920s. Later, Saroukhan, through the pages of the weeklies *Rose El-Youssef* and *Akhbar El-Yom*, put more of his characteristic fingerprints on the history of political cartoons in Egypt.

These two publications, which grew into 2 major publishing houses, were and still are the greenhouse, the cradle of cartoonists. Egyptians consider these two publishing houses as schools of caricature in Egypt.

Mohamed Abdel-Moneim Rakha was the first Egyptian-born cartoonist. Over nearly 60 years he drew thousands of cartoons dealing with the political and social aspects of Egyptian life. Rakha's different cartoon characters have their own peculiar language and great sense of humour, titillating those connoisseurs of humour, the Egyptians. Rakha challenged everything, and was considered "the knight of the Egyptian cartoon".

Some historians mention Pharaonic drawings from ancient Egypt as the beginning of the art of caricature. These historians refer to drawings now present in the collections of museums in Italy, England, Germany and the United States. In one, a mouse sits on a throne and a cat is serving him — obvious cartoon-type humour. In another, a donkey, a monkey, a lion and a crocodile are all members of a chorus, singing and playing music. In a third, a wolf is "shepherding" a flock of sheep.

In more recent Egyptian history, *Al-Nazara*, published by Yacoub Sami in 1881, is considered the first satire and cartoon magazine. Later, in 1921, *Al-Kashkaw* was published as a magazine of cartoons, drawn by Sami.

The use of cartoons as political tools or weapons spread in the 1930s and 1940s. Confronting the British occupying forces and those who were working with them or for them was a common purpose of the political satire in that period. Humour provided the means to let the messages — even harsh ones — pass.

For example, veteran journalist Musata Amin and Rakha created *Humor Efendi* (Donkey Efendi), the symbol of all opportunists and those who were ready to be the puppets of the ruling authorities. Generally, Egyptian cartoonists were almost never jailed because of their cartoons. Rakha was once jailed for nine months because of text added to his cartoon, not by him, but by people who wanted to harm him.

Collaboration amongst journalists and cartoonists is one of the distinguishing features of the *Akhbar El-Yom* school of political cartoons. Every Wednesday for years, the newspaper's cartoonists and writers gathered to discuss topics, ideas and ways to collaborate. Another characteristic of the *Akhbar El-Yom* school is the creation of a family of cartoon characters. This was the case with Rakha, and is now with Mus-

ta Hussein, the paper's current resident cartoonist. Since 1974, he has cooperated with the humourist Ahmed Ragab, and thus far, they have created about 15 characters, personifying various social phenomena and problems of daily life in Egypt.

Abdel-Routine is the bureaucrat who is always ready and eager to keep the tape intact — there is no way to break it. Kamboura, meanwhile, is a character who exploits anyone and anything at any time to satisfy his own personal ambitions and greed. And Kamboura's plans even include being a member of parliament.

Other popular cartoon figures invented by Musata Hussein and Ahmed Ragab included Abd el-Musabiq, a shadowy character of mediocre abilities whose dream is always to become a cabinet minister. Another figure is a peasant from a village called Kafir Al-Hanadwa who invariably takes the prime minister to task for government shortcomings. The peasant's biting criticism, couched in ostensibly kind words, is addressed directly or indirectly, quoting another peasant described as "loose-tongued". The weekly cartoon, formerly on an inside page, was moved to the front page of *Akhbar El-Yom* after Kamel El-Ganzouri became prime minister some weeks ago.

The Ragab-Hussein combination also has become famous for cartoons depicting the cabinet meeting secretly in a mountain cave, but all you can see are guards standing outside with walkie-talkies and then you hear the voices of ministers coming from inside, debating new taxes and tape or other unpopular subjects.

Focusing on the issues by personifying them, Mustafa Hussein contends, has "helped in changing some conditions". In these cases, the cartoon performs a "cleansing role and effect... It is like a red light, warning and alarming," Hussein told *Al-Ahram Weekly* recently.

The other, and perhaps the major, school of political and social cartoons in Egypt was and still is the *Rose El-Youssef* publishing house. The birth of *Sabah El-Kheir* weekly in 1956 added more to the caricature influence of the main mother magazine. Through the years, *Sabah El-Kheir* has introduced and presented many talents in this art, who have adopted various styles.

In the pages of this free-spirited magazine, Salah Jahn, a brilliant poet and one of the geniuses of modern caricature, pioneered new ways of handling social issues and hammering away at taboos. Jahn, as other cartoonists agree, brought caricature further away from being just a joke, to prove that it can present an attitude, a point of view. Jahn was the naughty boy who had "a lot of satire in his head, and he knew how to express it in a few lines and a few words", as his colleague Gomaa Farahat describes him.

Jahn's career had another stage at *Al-Ahram*, where he became the political cartoonist for years till his death in 1986. One of Jahn's cartoons became an example of



Wiping British boots by Abdel-Samie

The arms trade by Zohdi

Khayal Al-Zil (Shadow Play), 1924

Jahn's Socialist prosecutor



same "unknown person" was the one responsible for the Opera House fire, the disappearance of King Tut's sceptre and the absence of soap in the market. Jahn was in hot water after that, and only barely escaped the wrath of the socialist prosecutor.

Pointing an accusing finger at the responsible person, underlining the slow pace of decision-making and criticising the government's apparent unwillingness to make life easier and fairer have been the main

and characters.

In the world of Egyptian caricature, Gomaa Farahat's cartoons have been well known to *Al-Ahram Weekly* readers since the newspaper's first issue. His *Ra'y Fi Soura* (An opinion in a picture) has appeared in *Rose El-Youssef* for the past 15 years. In his 30 year career of political cartooning, Farahat has always maintained *Rose El-Youssef* and *Sabah El-Kheir* as his base. In the 1980s and 1990s, he has pub-

— "government vs opposition" issues — and the other entitled "Hot World" — a collection of international issues dedicated to "democracy Third World-style".

During the last two decades, pioneer cartoonists have passed away. The loss of Saroukhan, Rakha, Abdel-Samie, and Salah Jahn has left holes in the soul of political cartooning in Egypt. Others, like Babgat, Higazi, Ihab, and Hangeouri, are dealing less and less with political issues, and have become involved in children's books and other art forms.

New talents are now budding, but they need more venues for their work. Since 1990, the weekly *Caricature* has provided an excellent opportunity for both cartoonists and readers. This privately owned magazine, the only one of its type, has already established itself in the Arab market as a humour and cartoon magazine. Some critics are concerned about it being overloaded with ar-

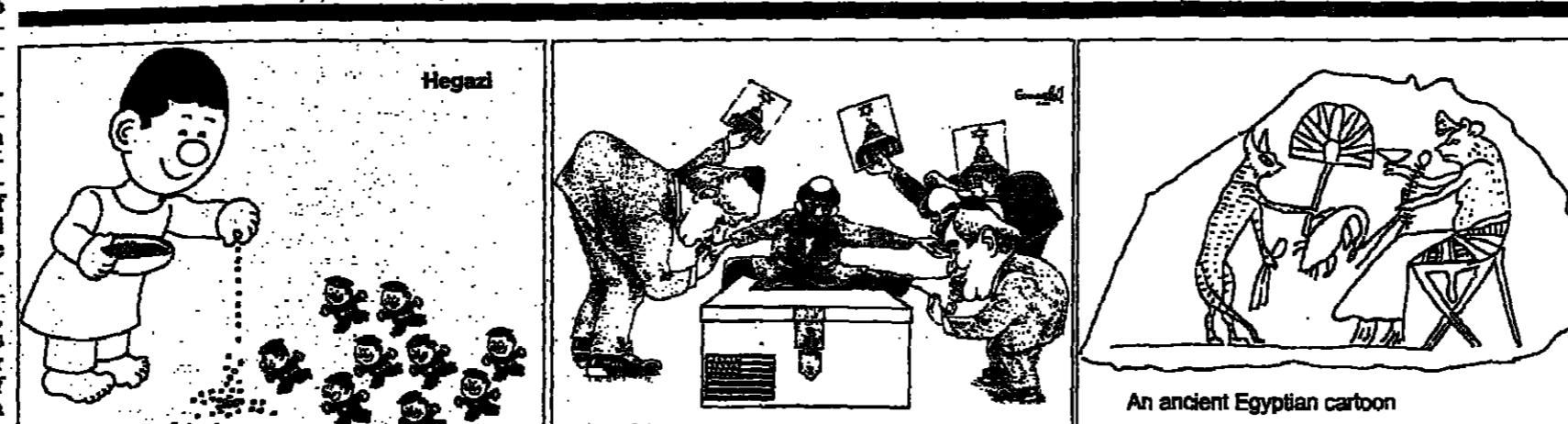
chitectural achievements, challenges and clashes with the ruling powers. Cartoons of past decades — originals, in particular — need better care to save them from loss and damage.

Lovers of the Egyptian cartoon hope that official and non-official organisations will pay more attention to this form of art. They also hope that the International Museum of Cartoon Art, which will open the weekend of 7 March, in Boca Raton, Florida, may push forward some local efforts, especially the ones started by the Egyptian Association of Cartoonists.

The brainchild of *Sabah El-Kheir*'s veteran cartoonist Zohdi, the Egyptian Association of Cartoonists was formed in 1984. For decades, Egyptian cartoonists had struggled as individuals, so the creation of this organisation demonstrated a long-overdue support network for the artists and the art. Zohdi's enthusiasm and efforts in bringing the idea of this association to fruition were impressive: he brought the same enthusiasm to work, against all odds, for the establishment of an international museum of caricature to be based in Egypt, a pet project which he never saw materialise.

The limited resources of the association delayed the realisation of the cartoonist's dream and plan, although the number of the association's members reached about 60. After Zohdi's death in 1994, cartoonist Musata Hussein took over the chairmanship and soon was able to raise funds through the sale of cartoonists' works and through his own public relations skills. Now the association has acquired a headquarters, and is planning to publish a series of cartoon books collecting works of pioneer cartoonists. The first book will be a collection of Zohdi's works.

Edited by Fouad El-Gawhary



the conflict between cartoonist and authorities in recent years. It was in President Anwar El-Sadat's time, and the person presented in the cartoon was the socialist prosecutor. In the offending cartoon, Jahn commented on this person's latest pronouncement that an "unknown person" was responsible for the contamination of the water (i.e. that no one in the government should be blamed). The cartoon showed the same person saying that the

aims of Egypt's political cartoonists in the last two decades. The tone of the criticism in general is becoming harsher, due to the existence of opposition publications, and increasing room for opposition within the nationally-owned press. Local and national issues are, moreover than ever, the source of inspiration for, as well as the target of, political cartoonists. The international issues are present, but are no longer used as a way to avoid the once risky focus on local themes

lished cartoons in most of the opposition newspapers, but, he says, "I always kept my independence"; he does not want and has not tried to be the mouthpiece of any party.

Jahn's cartoons are published through the Cartoonists and Writers Syndicate in many American and international newspapers and magazines. Several years ago, two collections of his cartoons were published, one a collection of local cartoons

articles and other written material. But to publish a magazine exclusively for cartoons is risky and almost impossible, according to cartoonist Mustafa Hussein, the magazine's editor-in-chief.

The Egyptian cartoon society, besides taking care of newcomers and keeping alive the Egyptian sense of humour on the printed page, needs more historical documentation of its past. Without a doubt, the past of the Egyptian political cartoon

Ramesses on the move?

Debate on the relocation site of Ramesses II has been revived after a period of dormancy. Sherine Nasr reports on the latest indecision

The original plan was for the colossal statue of the pharaoh to have its new home on El-Rimaya Square on the fringe of the Giza Plateau. But just this week, at the 28th Cairo International Book Fair, Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni said that the statue might be moved to one of four sites. Once again, it is uncertain where Ramesses II will show off his newly scrubbed pink granite.

A month ago, a resolution was made by the Permanent Committee of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) to move Ramesses II to El-Rimaya Square. The minister of culture still stands by this decision: relocating the statue would improve the flow of traffic in the congested Ramesses Square, and would safeguard Ramesses II from the hazards of air pollution and vehicle vibrations. But the SCA resolution was never implemented due to continued debate on the merits of the site; some deemed the square too vast, arguing that the statue would look misplaced and lose its grandeur. Though El-Rimaya Square is still considered a possibility, the door is now open to debate on other alternatives.

Mit Rahina is Ramesses II's original home. According to Zahi Hawass, general director of the Giza Plateau, and an enthusiastic supporter of the idea to move the statue back to the capital of ancient Egypt, statues like Ramesses II should never be placed in big squares since there is no permanent planning for squares in Cairo. "What happened to the statue in Ramesses Square will most likely occur in any other square," he says. In his view, it is a conceptual matter: the ancient Egyptians carved these statues to stand aloof at their ancient sites, unperturbed by flyovers and traffic. Hawass is not the only one to favour the site where Ramesses II was discovered in the 19th century. Dr Gamal Muktahar, former director of the SCA and an UNESCO expert, also approves of Mit Rahina, provided that once Ramesses II is moved there, the site is turned into a tourist destination and placed on a visitors map.

The statue could also find its new home on the airport road. But the minister of culture rejects this possibility since a copy of the statue is already there. "This would be a great mistake," he says.

Finally, SCA head Abdel-Halim Nureddin thinks the most "suitable" solution is to place the statue at the entrance of the antiquities museum that is being planned for the Cairo-Fayoum road. He says that such a site is most likely to be approved. Once a final decision is made on a new site, tenders from construction companies will be invited.

Technically speaking, moving the statue is no easy matter. Shawki Nakha, head of the Restoration Department at the SCA, says that experts must study methods of dismantling and detaching the statue from its huge 30-tonne cemented base. The statue consists of three parts — the head and chest,



WOULD RAMSES SQUARE still be Ramesses Square if its namesake were no longer there? At the Weekly, we've left that philosophic dilemma to the cartographers of the future and moved the statue ourselves.

Because of all the damage wreaked by

pollution and vibrations at its present location, for years antiquities officials have talked about moving the pharaoh. The remaining question has always been, where to? One suggestion — first proposed by Hosny Guindly on the opinion pages of Al-Ahram in 1989 — was for the statue to

serve as a beacon on the Nile as well as a reinforcement of the life-long bond between ancient and modern Egypt, and the great river — something like a Cairo version of the Statue of Liberty.

A far-fetched dream, perhaps, until one recalls the mammoth effort that saved the

four colossi of Ramesses at Abu Simbel in the 1960s. So, next time you cross Qasr El-Nil Bridge, stare at the river for a while, and imagine what might one day be.

Caption and graphic design by Tarek Atia

Nile photo by Sherif Sonbol

the trunk, and the legs and feet — and weighs 125 tonnes. And Nakha rules out the possibility that the SCA could do this alone. "Let's face it, the SCA has neither the money nor the expertise." He says that the SCA's main task is to restore and conserve monuments, not move them from one place to another. "The transfer can only be carried out with the aid of a specialised international company," he says.

The statue has been held under a microscope since last

October when a SCA restoration committee started to remove thin layers of filth — the result of pollution — from the statue's colossus. "Before the cleaning process started, the statue had turned dark grey. The natural colour of the pink granite had almost disappeared," said Raafat Marzouk who was in charge of the clean-up.

After scrubbing the statue with brushes, fresh water and soft sponges, it was covered with an isolator for

conservation. Some parts of the crown, the right fist, and the right foot were also specially tended to. The original statue had no feet when it was first discovered at Mit Rahina. Once transported to Ramesses Square in 1954 on the second anniversary of the 26th of July Revolution, international specialists designed the lower legs and feet to support the mass. "The statue's right foot is perhaps the weakest part of the whole structure," says Marzouk.

Curtain call for a reborn Sphinx

Plans are under way to unveil a new and improved Sphinx. Nevine El-Aref reports

Since the beginning of February, restoration efforts have picked up momentum in preparation for the unveiling of the new and improved Sphinx. Visitors will now have a panoramic view of the site while the Sphinx will enjoy a clearer view of its admirers.

The area's new look has sparked a flurry of activity. Kiosks selling postcards and souvenirs were moved to a new location south of the second pyramid. A circular limestone wall two metres from the Sphinx was built to separate Nazlet Al-Siman, from the archaeologically

protected area.

"Behind the wall, at a lower level, five limestone service kiosks were built using the same medium and design as the old ones in order to preserve the integrity of the Giza Plateau," explained Mansour Radwan, an inspector at Giza.

The services include a police station, an antiquities inspector, toilets and two guest houses.

Another wall was built on the plateau extending

from the Sphinx to the Giza Plateau. It is flanked on one side by a road for pedestrians. Cars are prohibited from parking in the Sphinx area, but may do so at the new parking area located behind the Sound and Light Show administration building.

Meanwhile the ground in front of the Sphinx has been covered with small blocks of limestone to make walking easier, and the paved paths have

been painted a natural desert colour.

Zahi Hawass, general director of the Giza Plateau, said the new additions are part of a larger Giza Plateau project. "The last stage of the project is the most important," Hawass said. The final stage is scheduled to start in the summer and will include the establishment of a cultural centre which will provide visitors with new and used books on archaeology, slides and

documentary films.

"Access to the area will be limited to pedestrians. Camels and horses will be relegated to Saqqara where a fun fair will be established for Cairenes who want to spend a day out. A stable for horses will be built next to the Mena House Hotel in order to serve tourists who want to have a ride around the area."

The project was planned by UNESCO and executed by the Engineering Antiquities

Life-long dream in search of a site

The life-long dream of a venerated French archaeologist will come true after all. Omayma Abdel-Latif traces the controversy surrounding a new museum at Saqqara



The reconstructed entrance to Djoser's Step Pyramid Complex (left) and the Imhotep Museum before being demolished photo: Ayman Ibrahim

A French patriarch of Egyptology, Jean Philippe Lauer, has been working on the Saqqara Plateau for 70 years and will be allowed to build his museum — though not quite where he planned it. A new site is slated to be chosen by a committee consisting of Lauer himself, Abdel-Halim Nureddin, head of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), and Zahi Hawass, director of antiquities at Giza Plateau.

"They objected to the location for the museum even though it was the only possible one," said Lauer, who returned from a short trip to France to find work on the museum halted. Shocked, he immediately set up a meeting with Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni, who assured him that the project itself "had been okayed" but that the actual location was still pending.

"But it was discussed seven years ago," Lauer told the Weekly. "It is the lowest point on the plateau and could not be seen from the Step Pyramid — so it would do nothing to impair the panorama of the site, which is 12 metres below the level of the plateau."

Antiquities officials told Lauer that tombs had been found near the chosen site, so his museum had to be put on hold. "Well, Saqqara is full of tombs," argues Lauer. "The museum site was some 100 metres from Djoser's Step Pyramid Complex. There is hardly an inch here

that does not contain ruins."

The controversy began two weeks ago when the *Al-Akhbar* newspaper questioned whether the museum's location violated UNESCO's guidelines on the preservation of world heritage sites. During five months of construction, the main framework of the concrete pillars had been completed. They have now been demolished to prepare the site for excavation.

Every morning, at nine o'clock sharp, Lauer shows up at the French House at Saqqara to inspect a new site, supervise the unearthing of a new "find", or simply check on the various archaeological activities in the area. "It's a hard habit to break," he says.

It was Lauer who first recognised the importance of the Step Pyramid Complex. When he started to work there in 1936, it was the only monument that rose above the level of the sand. The rest of the site was ruined. "It was constructed around 2900 BC and only a few metres of wall or column bases survived," explains Lauer. "They were covered with drift sand."

But Lauer decided to spend the rest of his life reconstructing the site. Few visitors to the plateau realise that the slight, energetic man who, year after year, painstakingly matches up shattered columns, is the French scholar who actually reconstructed the remarkable creations of

Imhotep, the world's first recorded architect.

Lauer recalls that 70 years ago foreign missions worked at Saqqara. "I started working under the supervision of Pierre Lacau, then director general of the Service des Antiquités. I worked with the British archaeologist Cecil Firth for five years, but after he died in 1931, I continued alone. I managed to unearth the southern Tomb of Djoser, builder of the Step Pyramid, in 1927. It was a very significant discovery at the time. I worked until the outbreak of the second world war when I had to leave the country. I returned in 1945, anxious to get back to work again."

Lauer says that it took him 10 years to rebuild

the entrance to the complex, and that a stamp was issued to mark the occasion. "I have kept the stamp until now," he says, fishing through his worn-out wallet to locate it.

After what Lauer calls "the Suez affair" — the 1956 Anglo-French-Israeli attack on Egypt — Tharwat Okasha, then minister of culture, agreed that he could spend a four-month archaeological season at Saqqara every year. During that time he was involved in reconstructing various monuments in addition to the Step Pyramid Complex.

For the last 10 years, Lauer has been working on his model museum, designed to house relics from the some 4,700-year-old site. "At every

important archaeological site," he explains, "there are architectural elements and statuary that cannot be put back in their original positions." So he designed a museum, the centre of which would be reserved for a model of Imhotep's construction — the monumental complex of King Djoser.

Lauer said that a rectangular room to the left of the central hall would display some of the capitals of columns that were either not finished, or just roughly hewn, as well as "a lintel carved with *djed* pillars finely sculptured or painted, some ceiling blocks coloured in red, and fragments of *uraei* (cobras)."

The museum is also designed to house a boundary stela carved with inscriptions containing the Horus name of Djoser and the names of two of his daughters; a part of the base of the statue of Djoser bearing the name and titles of his architect Imhotep; reproductions of Djoser's stelae from the "south tomb"; as well as stone vessels and alabaster vases recovered from the site.

"The Imhotep museum will be the only museum of its kind in the world, and will be of value to Egyptologists, amateurs, tourists and students of antique art," says Lauer, who fiercely trusts that his dream museum will be built after all, though not at the site where he has dedicated his life.

Satellite service

International tennis players are in Cairo for the Egyptian Satellite Tennis Tournament. Nashwa Abdel-Tawab follows them as they move from club to club in search of victory

With \$25,000 on the table as prize money, the first Egyptian satellite tennis tournament of this year has attracted a total of 70 players from countries as diverse as the Ukraine, Belgium, Spain, Argentina, Austria, the USA, Germany, France, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, Finland, Russia, Italy, Morocco, Venezuela and Puerto Rico. For the Egyptian Tennis Federation, the satellites are all part of the process of improving the standard of the sport in the country. For the young Egyptian players, the tournaments provide a chance to meet their foreign counterparts on court, without the expense and trouble of travelling abroad. Five satellite tournaments are planned for this year. Each satellite consists of four championships, played at four different venues — hence the term "satellite".

This year's top-ranked player was Vacek Roubick, number 229 in the world rankings, the highest ranked player to take part in four years of Egyptian satellite tournaments, according to Carmelo Di Dio, the championship's International Tennis Federation (ITF) supervisor.

However, the 23-year-old Czech was unable to live up to expectations, going out in both singles' championship: first to Venezuelan Juan Szymanski 7-5 6-2 in the quarterfinals of the first tournament and then to Dominik Hrbaty 6-7(4) 6-1 7-5 in an exciting semifinal in the second tournament.

Both tournaments were eventually won by 18-year-old Slovak Dominik Hrbaty, who confounded his rivals with cool nerves and total concentration. In the first tournament, he beat Szymanski 6-2 3-6 6-3 in the final; he won the second tournament with a straight sets victory over Russian Andrei Merinov 6-3 6-3. Hrbaty was also responsible for depriving Amr Ghoneim, the remaining Egyptian competitor, of a chance to progress beyond the quarterfinals. "I'm very hopeful of winning this satellite tournament since I'm in good shape," said an optimistic Hrbaty, whose two victories have pushed his rank up from 329 to 309.

Hrbaty's winning streak came to an end in the doubles, however. Partnered by the Finn Tapio Nurminen, the pair lost their first match in the first tournament 2-6 6-2 to the Spanish couple Sergei Duran and Ruben Fernandez. And in the second tournament the pair lost the final 6-2 6-4 to Andrei Merinov of Russia and Andrei Rybalko of the Ukraine.

There are still two tournaments to come in this year's first satellite tournament. This week the satellite moves to the Shooting Club in Dokki; next week will find the players out of Cairo, in Mansoura, to give tennis fans all around the country the chance to watch good tennis live.



Egypt's Ghoneim returns a volley

Hockey caught in deep freeze

Since last October, Azmi Geit, the coach of the national hockey team, has been caught between a rock and a hard place.

Nonetheless, the national team under Geit has achieved encouraging results. In the last of three matches played last week, they decisively defeated the African champions, Sharqya, 4-2. In the other two matches, they trounced the Eastern Tobacco Company's team, 5-1 only to tie 4-4 with Souid.

The two wins, especially that against Sharqya, reflected the coach's and the team's desire to succeed against all odds. The games were played with a calm, cautious, unstrained technique, enhanced by cooperation and a smoothly executed 3-3-1 system. The positioning of Ibrahim Tawfiq as central defender and Amr Osman as attacker also helped the team strike a much-needed balance.

However, the 4-4 tie with Souid was indicative of the national team's low morale. They dominated the first half of the match, scoring three amazing goals while Souid only responded with one. But in the second half, Souid's players

managed to get their act together and launch a strong counter-attack, quickly scoring three goals to tie the score. The stumbling block for the national team came in the short corners department, where they botched seven attempts while Souid's strikers managed to convert two of their five into goals.

Geit and his players agree that such foul-ups are the result of a lack of motivation resulting from little to no international exposure. Among the team's only international matches was one held last December against Britain's national team. The British, at the time, were on a training tour in preparation for the 1996 Olympics, and with more motivation and international experience, managed to defeat Egypt 2-0 and 3-1. Geit, however, saw the loss to Britain as a learning experience which highlighted the team's strength, weakness and potential.

"Look at our performance and compare both teams," he said. "Many players on the British team are either Olympians,

professionals or world-ranked. Moreover, their training system is geared for not only continental events, but also international competitions and world championships."

The Egyptian national team, said Geit, needed a maximum of encouragement and financial assistance to raise both standards and morale.

Last year, however, the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports (SCYS) decided that no matter the outcome of the Continental Cup, the team would receive no guarantees about a ticket to the Atlanta Olympics. All efforts to get the SCYS to reconsider its decision fell flat, leaving the players demoralised and dismayed.

General Shamsi, president of the Egyptian Hockey Federation (EHF) persuaded the parties involved to bury the hatchet, but deep wounds take a long time to heal. Disenchanted and apathetic, the team travelled to South Africa for the Continental Cup and lost the title for the first time.

For captain Magdi Abdallah, the loss

was especially demoralising. He bungled a last minute penalty shot which had it landed in the goal, would have given the team a 4-3 victory over South Africa in this league-style tournament. History has a way of repeating itself, and the team, fresh from the defeat in the continental cup, also blew the 6th All Africa Games last September leaving only the African Nations Cup in April and the African World Cup qualifiers in the middle of 1996 to prove themselves and regain face. But, with morale at an all time low and training techniques failing short of the mark, it is all too easy to imagine the team in the loser's corner once again.

Such a fate for hockey would be particularly sad, given Egypt's past glory in this sport. No other team in Egypt's recent history has achieved so much, so consistently, as Sharqya and the national team. But again, funding needs seem to be at the heart of the crisis. And crisis it certainly is: Egypt is facing the potential demise of another of its favourite sports.

Sumo supreme

The heavyweights are here. Sumo wrestling, first introduced to Egypt three years ago, looks poised for success under the control of the judo federation. Abeer Anwar investigates

Sumo wrestling, the national sport of Japan, popularised in other countries through widespread television coverage, was more or less unknown in Egypt until August 1991. It was then that a group of International Sumo Federation representatives visited Cairo to give a demonstration at the Zohour Club.

The sport, which to the outside observer is characterised by little more than huge, scantly-clad men moving around each other in circles, with legs bent, is actually a highly-skilled competitive art. The aim of each player is to push his opponent out of the circle, which has a radius of 5.44 metres, or to make any part of his body touch the floor. In doing this, the player is not allowed to touch the floor himself, even while trying to push his opponent down. There are four weights: under 85kg, under 115kg, heavyweight, and open weight.

The sumo garb, called the *mawashi*, is a simple six-metre strip of cloth which is wrapped around the waist and between the player's legs. It was the one aspect of the sport that did not go down well with some Egyptian players and spectators. "As players from Islamic countries, it didn't suit us," explained Major Samir El-Hadi, manager of the Egyptian Judo Federation. "But it was agreed that the players could wear black stretch shorts under their *mawashi*."

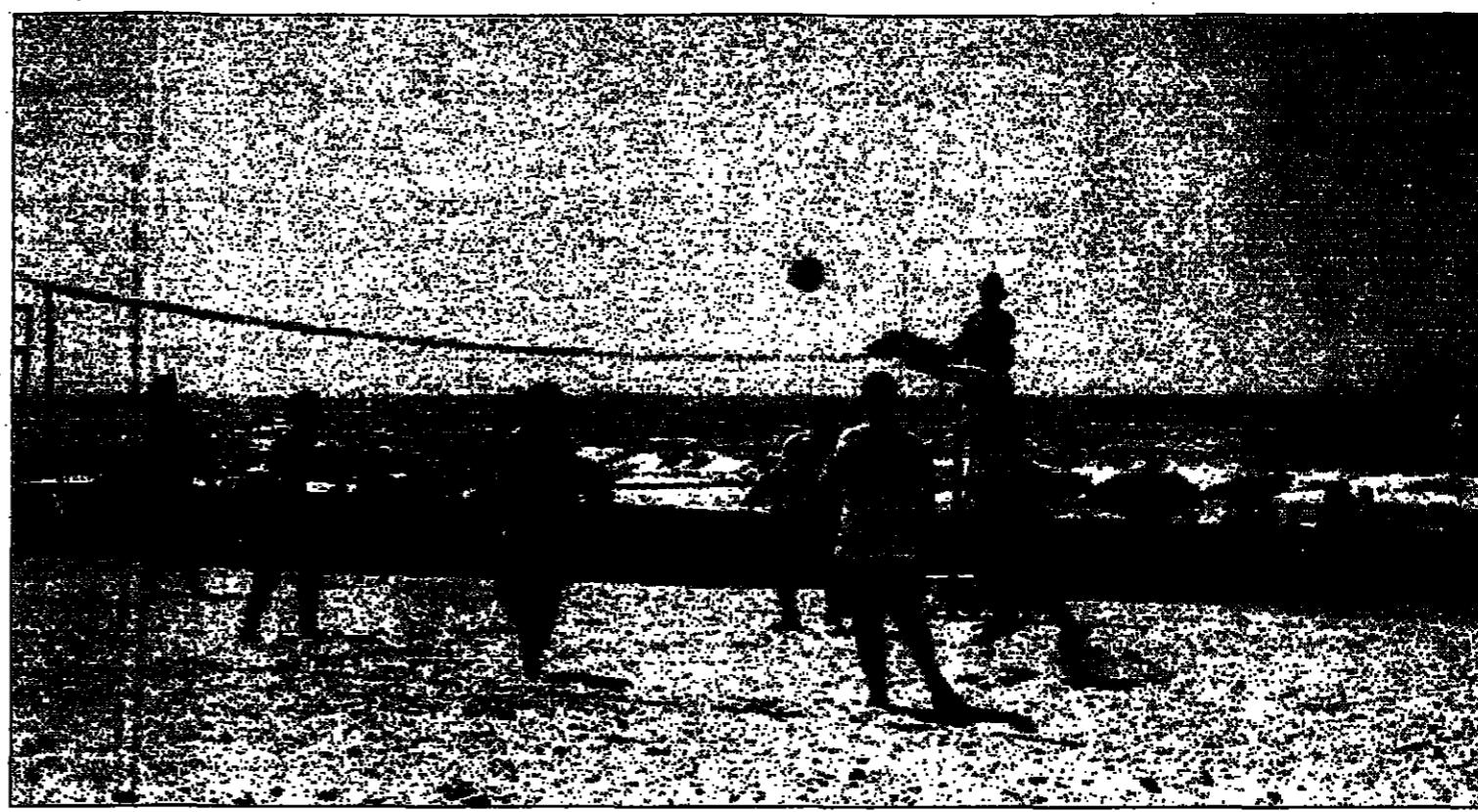
As a result, stretch shorts have become popular with wrestlers from Eu-

rope and Africa, as well as Islamic countries.

After the initial demonstration, interest in the sport grew. "Egypt was invited to participate in sumo's first World Championships in Japan in 1992. We took three players and a coach," said El-Hadi. "This championship brought achievement for the newcomers, with Hatem Nabil scoring third place in the under 115kg category. This initial success began to look like beginners luck when the team pulled out of the 1993 championships and failed to achieve anything in the following year. But the last World Championships in December 1995 in Japan was a different story. Three Egyptians took part: Ebab Nader in the under 85kg, Mohamed Kamal in the under 115kg and Mohamed Atia in the heavyweight section. The team took ninth place out of 40 teams, beating countries like England, which, as El-Hadi commented, had progressed further in the sport than Egypt. Another positive result of the championship was the choice of El-Hadi to be president of the African region of the International Sumo Federation.

Whereas players previously had to rely on books, videos and the limited experience of local coaches, Egypt's performance persuaded the international federation to send a Japanese expert to run a training tournament for local coaches. The federation is also planning subsidies for Egypt and the Arab region

Edited by Inas Mazhar



Playing beach volleyball, enjoying the sun, sand and sea

Sport for all Egyptians

To produce a top athlete takes years of training, possibly large sums of money, and last but not least — natural, inborn talent. Egypt has massive human resources, and to ensure that the country is able to realise its full potential of sporting talent, the Sports For All Committee of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sport (SCYS) has embarked on a campaign to uncover talents and boost sport throughout the country.

Headed by Abdel-Wahid Abdel-Aziz, the committee began by launching open competitions in popular sports like football, volleyball, basketball, and cycling. The enthusiasm of the competitors and the increasing popularity of the competitions prompted the committee to sponsor other events: recreational beach festivals in resorts like Alexandria, Al-Arish, South Sinai, and Hurghada, with beach volleyball, beach racket, and jetskiing. Then later, competitions in traditional events like camel racing and horse dancing were inaugurated in Sharqya, attracting participants from as far afield as Upper Egypt and the Western Desert.

With the growing number of activities in provinces outside Cairo, the SCYS recently decided to establish a Sport For All Federation, a non-governmental body to organise and supervise provincial competitions. "We have increasing numbers of sportsmen and women coming from far-flung governorates to take part in our events," said Abdel-Wahid Abdel-Aziz. It was decided that a special federation was the best way to accommodate this growing interest. The new federation will include representatives from each province, from the media, the Ministry of Education, and professors from the Faculty of Physical Education, Abdel-Aziz added.

Together, they will examine sport in each province: its customs, its sports' heritage, and the status of women in sport. "Having someone from every province will help in determining the best way to promote sports there, and will also help in seeking local business sponsorship," Abdel-Aziz explained.

Although the federation aims at financial independence, the SCYS is to provide a start-up grant, the amount of which has yet to be decided. The rest, Abdel-Aziz said, would be provided by sponsors. Abdel-Moneim

Emara, head of the SCYS, will announce the names of the federation's board of directors by March. Once the federation is established, the Sports For All Committee will confine its responsibilities to major events.

The new federation's responsibilities will go beyond merely promoting events. "We will also evaluate youngsters' physical fitness," said Sami Arafa of the Faculty of Physical Education. "In time, we will be able to carry out surveys to discover areas in which Egyptians are particularly talented." He cited squash and weightlifting as examples of sports where Egyptians have excelled in recent years, while nations sometimes in sports like tennis and football have been in decline.

Arafat also stressed the importance of having branches of the federation in all the provinces, in order to create a wider base from which to select promising young athletes to join national teams. And in addition, the new faculty will provide job opportunities for graduates of the Faculty of Physi-

No matter the potential, if untapped and unchallenged, the national hockey team could find itself accepting the consolation prize instead of the gold, writes Eric Asomugha

Tennis

FORMER world number one Stefan Edberg, who is retiring this year, has withdrawn from Sweden's Davis Cup quarterfinals in India in April because of health fears. "I know of many people who have caught mysterious illnesses in India and never fully got over them," Edberg said. He cited the cases of a Swedish journalist who continues to suffer from bouts of malaria after visiting India in 1985, and his former coach Tony Pickard, who lost 20 kilos while visiting the country. Edberg, who is currently ranked 33 in the world, is still a power to be reckoned with on grass, the surface to be used in the forthcoming quarterfinals.

Athletics

JAPAN has won the 1996 Yokohama International Women's Ekiden, a relay marathon, in record time. Minori Hayakari took the lead on the third of six legs to pave the way for Japan to beat Romania by more than two minutes, finishing in 2 hours, 14 minutes, 15 seconds, the fastest time ever recorded in the 14-year-old Ekiden. It was Japan's second consecutive victory and fourth win overall. The previous fastest time, 2:15:31, was set by six Russian runners in 1994. Russia, a five-times winner, did not enter the race this year. Romania came second with 2:16:35, followed by China with 2:18:43. The race is run through the streets of Yokohama, a port city 30 kilometres southwest of Tokyo.

Lisez dans



Assiout

Retour de la violence ou événements isolés ?

Le coton augmente

Le textile part en lambeaux

Assassinat du général transfuge iraqien

Bagdad renforce son isolement

Foire du livre

La politique prend le dessus

Portrait de Mahmoud Al-Saadani

Un polémiste contre les bien-pensants

Rédacteur en Chef

Exécutif

Mohamed Salmawy

Président et Rédacteur en Chef

Ibrahim Nafie

Ibrahim Aslan: On the wing

Although young writers traditionally delight in proclaiming war against their predecessors, writers of the '90s mention his name fondly. He is one of the few novelists who really moved them — struck a chord somewhere, caught, and then held their attention

In the works of many of his successors, Ibrahim Aslan's inspiration is clearly discernible. Outside the literary circle, *Malik Al-Hazzan* ("The Heron") achieved wide popularity when it was turned into a film. Audiences loved *Al-Kif Kaf* — and it wasn't just the intellectuals. In the working-class district where Aslan lives with his wife and two sons, the film made him a celebrity.

Neighbours who think that Aslan became wealthy overnight thanks to the film, contemplate his 1958 Beetle car in bewilderment. His mechanic, who fixes it on a regular basis, keeps telling him: "When you get a new car, you'll realize just what a drag this one is." But Aslan is sticking to his old life-style — the same flat, the same alleyway, the same livelihood, and above all, the same self-reliant approach to experience and knowledge: the transformation of the world into new, solid prose.

Like his old car, Aslan's arteries hit trouble in their sixth decade. The shadow of death hovered over the writer who had pitted himself against death in all its social and intellectual manifestations. But Aslan had major heart surgery in London, courtesy of the state, and returned in good health — a crucial experience he narrates in the same tones he uses to describe eating a *ful* sandwich. His attitude vis-à-vis death — before, during and after the surgery — is the same as his attitude towards life, indeed the same as that of his characters. Death, in Aslan's writing, is not the destruction of the individual; rather, it is part of the ever-changing essence of collective-life — the old giving way to the new. Death in his works is enveloped in a bitter-sweet humour that attenuates its ugliness and attendant grief: funerals are always brimming with irony.

Aslan moved with his family from Tanta to Bab Al-Shaariya in Cairo during World War II. The Postal Service gave his father a 50-piastre raise and the family moved: it was as simple as that. Certain sights at the time were to leave an indelible mark on his mind: carried on his mother's chest, the searchlights from the German aircraft; shafts of light searching the sky for the planes; cannons going off; moments of pure panic; rushing for shelter; people huddled in doorways. The quest for a better life — for a 50-piastre raise — had meant leaving the security of Tanta for the air raids of Cairo. Amidst this clamour, his mother gave birth to twins. Aslan is the eldest of 12 brothers and sisters, five of whom died early. Life

and death were always interwoven in his early awareness.

The move to Cairo was followed by another move: from Bab Al-Shaariya to another popular area, Al-Kif Kaf in Imbaba. Aslan spent his youth in an alley overlooking the Nile. *Effendis* (the educated turban-wearers) were in fact few and far between in Al-Effendi Alley, but the tiny street was his launching-pad onto the meandering road of education: government schools, which gave him the basics, and a wider grasp of cultural life, acquired as an auto-didact. He belongs to the order of self-taught intellectuals, beside Abbas El-Aqqad and Salsabe Moussa. After studying the Qur'an at the *kuttab* of Al-Sheikh Qurb, he went to primary school, obtaining the certificate which at the time guaranteed a minimum of solid information and a fair aptitude in English — the basic tools of self-support. Aslan's educational apprenticeship was a very rich one, even though he never received a higher degree.

Aslan moved from a technical institute to a carpet and textile school in Abbasya — the same one which novelist Gamal El-Ghitani later joined. There he learned the ins and outs of design and application: the conception of a pattern, the weaving together of separate threads to create a whole. He left off carpet-making for the War Industries Polytechnic, which eventually disappeared after 1952. He spent three years there learning many crafts: iron-mongering, tinsmithery, turning, as well as history, geography and strategy. When the school was closed down, the government unloaded its pupils in Prince Shewikar's Vocational School in Heliopolis. Here Aslan learned automotive engineering and draughtsmanship.

True, swotting and sweating through exams were not part of his formation, but Aslan learned essential lessons in the shaping of matter according to human design, the use of tools fit for the purpose, the importance of the partial and concrete. He poured these lessons into the craft that was to become his own: writing. He became a master craftsman in the creation of dialogues, and in the fine-tuning of his plots. When, in one of his stories, Aslan describes the work of a master craftsman, making a copper tray laid in silver, one feels he is describing the techniques of his own writing: etching the design on the metal, then filling the grooves with molten silver.

His apprenticeship at various schools of handwork has enabled him to describe human action in its most nuanced detail, to bring out movement and events in a round-

ed way — the preparation of a fishing rod, of a meal or a funeral. It is a quality that lends credence to his sense of kinship with Hemingway. With a sense of the dramatic, he portrays actions in the present. And, like Hemingway, he moves from one detail to the next in clipped sentences, without sudden leaps to the abstract totality.

From the very start, Aslan read novels avidly, particularly those of the charming master-thief Arsin Lupin, packed as they were with action and surprises. At primary school, his English language teacher, Mohamed Abu Youssef (later to become a script writer of renown) helped him obtain a membership card in the national library. Aslan's was the young teacher's Cupid, arranging rendezvous between Abu Youssef and his sweethearts which would otherwise have been impossible in that conservative district. As an Asian story-teacher and pupil do not see each other for a long time; when they meet again, shortly before the teacher's death, he does not recognise his former pupil when he runs into him at a cafe, and only remembers when certain events are called to mind. In life, things turn out slightly differently: if in the stories the past cannot be recaptured, in life the script-writer weeps as he recalls his youth. Then the two of them part, and the former pupil recalls how he used to chase girls in front of school, when the chase and the mere desire were of great significance.

When it became necessary for the boy to get a job, Aslan's father had him join the Postal Service. He was assigned the tasks of itinerant postman in Al-Mahalla Kobra. Setting out from a small post office which was to imprint itself on his memory, he sold stamps, distributed and registered letters in 15 villages. His means of transport in the countryside was a donkey, rented with a three-pound monthly stipend from the post office, termed "donkey expenses". Sometimes he used a bicycle.

Aslan came to know every inch of the places his work took him to, how to reach every house and everyone. Place was no longer an abstraction but had become for him a vivid human field, and the words inscribed on the envelopes translated into news, events, emotions. After eight long months, he was transferred to the post office headquarters in Mounira, where he worked for the distribution department. He still recalls how he would pause in the courtyards of houses, calling out the names of those who had received letters. But the novelist in Aslan put up a strong fight against the role of postman he had been assigned.

Before delivering magazines such as *Al-Musawwar* and *Al-Mukhtar* (the Arabic edition of *Reader's Digest*), he would "borrow" them, and sit browsing in a cafe, two shifts' worth of letters undelivered. When an inspector from the Postal Service caught him, it was only by dint of several wild manoeuvres that he escaped. In the wake of the incident, he was transferred to Garden City with its embassies and snappy streets (he now works in the Cairo bureau of *Al-Hayat* newspaper, on the same street where he used to distribute mail). Aslan also delivered letters to Bishar Fares, another resident of Latin America Street, whose works later emerged as part of the new wave of writing sweeping across Egypt. Fares received letters in French and his elegant home was stacked full of books.

It would seem that everything in Aslan's life bent itself to his will to become a writer, and to furnish him with the formation for that vocation. The almost manic diversity in Aslan's early career abated for a while with the nationalisation of the Marconi Telecommunications Company and its merger with the Postal Service. In 1962 he was transferred to the telegraph distribution department, where he remained until 1987, when the General Egyptian Book Organisation delegated him to act as deputy editor-in-chief of the distinguished literary series *Mukhtasar Fusul*. During the Marconi period, which was to find expression in his short stories collection *Wardiyat Layl* ("Night Shift"), Aslan devoted innumerable works in translation.

He also became acquainted with a colleague, a leftist who had somehow escaped the detention camps where a great number of Egyptian leftists resided in the early '60s. The man "adopted" Aslan, looking after him affectionately, but the two were never ideological allies. When the left-wing detainees were released in 1964, his colleague introduced him to a number of the ex-detainees. Aslan respected them for their attempts to merge with society at large. When he showed some of his early writings to a number of writers of similarly radical persuasions, they detected a genuine cry of rebellion against the status quo. In their opinion, though, it was not clear against whom the cry was directed. They also expressed the predictable reservation that literature must have a message, and that its social dimension should be foregrounded in the text.

But Aslan, like the characters in his works — like Youssef Al-Neggar the hero of "The Heron" — was not prepared to subscribe to any political trend. His stance was prompted by his conviction that he

could not participate in any political game if he was not allowed to take part in laying down its rules. He believes that institutions, organisations and parties take it upon themselves to dream for the writer and present him with preconceived opinions, thus domesticating and reducing him to a mere mouthpiece.

While Aslan has always sought to retain his intellectual independence, he does not consider that subjective individual vision suffices. He sees himself as a branch from the tree of his family, his people and his land, which nurture his individual consciousness. Aslan lived long years among the passions encapsulated within the terse words of cables. One of his hobbies was to skim through the files of telegrams — cables and received, sent from overseas and misplaced, telegrams that brought joy and grief. His long immersion confirmed his conviction that the telegraphic mode was most suited to his innate reticence. The brevity of the telegrams — each word counted, each picture calculated — also confirmed his faith in the spontaneous genius of people who may be illiterate but perfectly adept at phrasing and dictating a sentence that speaks volumes in very few words. The sender calls on all the experience and common frames of reference shared with the recipient; the keys to the common code are contained in the writing. Later, when the telegram reaches its destination, the code is deciphered, the full message, not inscribed in words, emerges.

Aslan became skilled at seeking out the shared elements. He has always sought for the keys that would strike a chord in the reader. In writing, his telegrams, rather than Hemingway, taught him economy. His long years among the letters and telegrams taught him the intricacies of alienation and loneliness, barely contained in the terse, tight-lipped half-sentences sent across the world. In his works themes such as the yearning for ties and close human relationships and the surmounting of obstacles to communication figure prominently.

It would be wrong, however, to imply that Aslan's writing is a record of his experience. Exile and communication are

not tackled: they are conveyed through tone, hue, relation betweenness and void in reality. He steers clear of clichéd situations and dictions; the texture of his writing has an individual, freshly minted quality, free of embellishment. His language is like his characters, re-created from the raw material of reality. His characters are often a composite from more than one person Aslan knows, interwoven with elements quipped from himself. Nor does he care to endow his characters with psychological dimensions or throw into relief their assumed hidden depths; instead, he regards their behaviour in all its nakedness: the words they utter are independent, their logic autonomous. His characters are never a vehicle for his ideas; never there to testify to his expertise.

When Aslan re-reads one of his works, he can never recall the "original" of a given character. Acquaintances recognised him in the hero of "The Heron", Youssef Al-Neggar, Joseph the Carpenter, but characters such as James, based in myth, who reads avidly and moves among fellow besieged intellectuals of the late 1950s and early '70s, some of whom occasionally enter jail for brief periods — as opposed to the protracted time served by leftists in the '60s. Youssef retains his individuality and keeps a certain distance from his friends.

Al-Kif Kaf, omitting the political dimension, rendered Youssef's independence and singularity — a fictional self-portrait of Aslan — without significance. To counterbalance this shortcoming, Youssef's stance was ascribed to a totally different context, namely the yearning to travel to some Gulf country and make money. This context, however, is totally alien to Aslan who, like the heron of his celebrated novel, *Malik Al-Hazzan*, is attached to the Egyptian soil and has no kingdom with migratory birds.

Profile by Ibrahim Fathi

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Sibongile Khumalo (bottom row centre) hits a high note — and hits the spot

Only one woman could take on 120 American tourists and still retain her charisma and charm. Temma Ecker, great friend and travel agent (how's that for a contradiction in terms) has decided to do what no sane human being has ever done before, and has brought over the largest single group of Americans to Egypt on her "Journeys of the mind" tour. To label their mood as excited and overjoyed would be an understatement: not many tourists can boast being taken to the site of the mausoleum of Ramses II's sons by the discoverer himself, Dr Kent Weeks. When I spoke to a few of the tourists during their welcome dinner on the Marriot's cruise ship "Maxime", attended by representatives of the AUC, several prominent academics and our Travel page editor, author Jill Kamli, I could practically smell the adrenaline in the air. Personally, I fear for the doctor's life. But miracles can happen — I did hear, after all, that all 120 of them managed to get through customs in 40 minutes.

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